Biography of Siraj Sikder

The Unfinished Revolution

S M NAZMUZ SAKIB

Biography of Siraj Sikder: The Unfinished Revolution

S M Nazmuz Sakib

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Biography of Siraj Sikder: The Unfinished Revolution
A Five-Part Comprehensive Academic Textbook on Revolutionary Theory, Colonial History, and Political Philosophy

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This textbook is intended for academic and educational use in advanced courses on South Asian history, revolutionary theory, political philosophy, postcolonial studies, jurisprudence, and comparative politics. The analyses, interpretations, and conclusions presented herein represent the scholarly assessment of the author based on available evidence as of the date of publication. The contested nature of many events and theoretical frameworks discussed means that alternative interpretations are legitimate and possible.

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Cataloguing Note: This five-part textbook offers a comprehensive intellectual and political biography of Siraj Sikder (1944–1975), founder of the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party, examining his colonial thesis, Maoist theoretical framework, the liberation war of 1971, the armed struggle against the post-independence Bangladeshi state, the jurisprudential questions surrounding his extrajudicial killing, and his enduring legacy in contemporary Bangladeshi politics, including the July 2024 uprising and the 2026 general election.

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PART ONE: ORIGINS, CONTEXTS, THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTIONARY MIND

PREFACE TO PART ONE

The life of Sirajul Huq Sikder, known to history simply as Siraj Sikder, constitutes one of the most remarkable, contested, and intellectually dense biographical subjects in the history of South Asian revolutionary politics. Born into a propertied Muslim family in Bengal in 1944, trained as a civil engineer at one of the subcontinent's most prestigious technical institutions, and killed under circumstances that remain legally and morally unresolved in January 1975, Sikder compressed into thirty years of life an intellectual and organizational achievement that scholars, jurists, political theorists, and activists continue to debate, analyze, and argue over with extraordinary passion more than five decades after his death.

This textbook is written for students of history, political science, jurisprudence, philosophy, and South Asian studies who wish to understand not simply what Siraj Sikder did, but why he did it, what theoretical frameworks governed his thinking, what precedents in world revolutionary history informed his practice, and what his life and death reveal about the deeper structures of political legitimacy, state violence, colonial inheritance, and the permanent tension between legal order and revolutionary justice. The book is also written for the general reader who senses that the story of Siraj Sikder is somehow larger than any single biography, that his trajectory opens onto questions that are urgent in 2026 as they were in 1968 or 1975.

Part One covers the period from the historical and geographical foundations of Bengal through to the formation of the East Bengal Workers Movement in January 1968. It is the longest part of the five-part series because it is the most foundational. To understand Siraj Sikder, one must understand Bengal, British colonialism, the Partition of 1947, the peculiar political economy of East Pakistan, the global fracture between Soviet and Chinese communism, the philosophical heritage of Marxism as it traveled eastward and transformed in tropical agrarian conditions, and the specific personal, educational, and intellectual experiences that converted a talented civil engineering graduate into the founder of one of the most theoretically sophisticated Maoist organizations in South Asian history.

Throughout this work, the author draws on jurisprudential philosophy, political theory, postcolonial studies, revolutionary theory, and the most recent scholarship produced in 2024 and 2025, including work produced in the aftermath of Bangladesh's Bloody July uprising of 2024, which thrust Siraj Sikder's legacy back into the center of Bangladeshi political consciousness with a force and urgency that would have surprised many scholars who had assumed his memory was receding into historical footnotes.

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CHAPTER ONE: BENGAL, THE BRITISH EMPIRE, AND THE LONG HISTORY OF COLONIAL EXTRACTION

1.1 Understanding the Land: Bengal as a Geopolitical and Cultural Unit

Before one can understand Siraj Sikder, one must understand Bengal. Not Bengal as it exists today, fragmented between Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal, but Bengal as a civilizational and geographic unit with its own internal logic, its own historical rhythms, its own class structures and cultural formations that stretch back centuries before the arrival of European colonialism.

Bengal in its fullest geographical sense encompasses the vast deltaic plain formed by the confluence of the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna rivers. This is one of the most fertile and densely populated regions of the earth. The Bengal delta, formed over millennia by the deposits of these rivers, produces conditions of extraordinary agricultural productivity. Rice cultivation in Bengal sustained some of the highest population densities in the premodern world. The waterways of the delta, the rivers and channels and seasonal floods, structured not only the agricultural calendar but the entire social and cultural organization of Bengali civilization.

Bengal had been a center of wealth in the subcontinent for a very long time. In the medieval period, under the Bengal Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire, the region was famous for its textiles, particularly its fine muslin cotton, which was exported across the Indian Ocean world and as far as the Mediterranean. The weavers of Dhaka and the surrounding region produced fabric of extraordinary fineness that commanded extraordinary prices in markets from Cairo to Amsterdam. Bengal's agricultural surplus and its artisanal production made it, in the seventeenth century, one of the wealthiest regions of Asia.

This wealth made Bengal a prize target. When the English East India Company began its penetration of the subcontinent from its base at Calcutta in the mid-eighteenth century, Bengal was the first major conquest and the foundation upon which British Indian empire was built. The Battle of Plassey in 1757, in which Robert Clive's forces defeated the Nawab of Bengal Siraj ud-Daulah through a combination of military force and the treachery of Mir Jafar, is the conventional starting point for British colonial rule in India. The plunder of Bengal that followed Plassey was enormous. The East India Company's servants enriched themselves through extortion and corruption on a massive scale. The tax revenues of Bengal were extracted and sent to Britain. The Company's commercial monopoly destroyed Bengali textile production by flooding the market with cheaper British machine-produced cloth.

This history is not merely background. It is directly relevant to understanding Siraj Sikder's theoretical framework. When Sikder, in his foundational 1968 thesis for the East Bengal Workers Movement, argued that East Bengal was a colony of Pakistan, he was drawing on a colonial analysis that had deep historical roots in the actual experience of Bengali people under successive waves of external rule. The experience of colonial extraction in Bengal was not abstract or theoretical. It was embedded in the material conditions of land, production, taxation,

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and cultural subordination that Bengali people had experienced for two centuries under the British and would experience in modified form under West Pakistani dominance after 1947.

1.2 The Structure of Colonial Rule in Bengal and Its Jurisprudential Legacy

British colonial rule in Bengal created specific legal and institutional structures that fundamentally shaped the class structure of the society and the distribution of political power. Understanding these structures is essential for understanding the political economy that Sikder analyzed and against which he organized.

The most consequential single legal act of British colonial rule in Bengal was the Permanent Settlement of 1793, introduced by Governor-General Charles Cornwallis. The Permanent Settlement created a class of landlords, known as zamindars, whose property rights in the land were permanently fixed in exchange for a fixed annual revenue payment to the colonial state. The intention was to create a loyal class of Bengali landlords who would have a stake in the stability of colonial rule and would serve as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the peasant cultivators.

The jurisprudential logic of the Permanent Settlement was deeply colonial. It imposed a particular conception of private property derived from English legal tradition onto a social formation where land rights had previously been far more complex, layered, and communal. The Permanent Settlement treated land as a commodity, as a form of absolute private property that could be bought, sold, and mortgaged, and it used the legal apparatus of the colonial state to enforce this conception against the customary rights and practices of Bengali peasant communities.

The consequences for the peasantry were devastating. The zamindars, freed from competition and guaranteed their revenue from the colonial state, had every incentive to extract the maximum possible rent from the peasants who actually worked the land. When harvests failed or prices fell, zamindars could and did seize peasant land for non-payment of rent. Over the nineteenth century, a class of landless and near-landless peasants emerged in Bengal on a scale that had not previously existed. The concentration of land in fewer and fewer hands created a social structure of acute inequality that would persist into the twentieth century and directly shape the political conditions in which Siraj Sikder operated.

The jurisprudential analysis of this process is important. Colonial law in Bengal did not merely regulate an existing social structure. It created a new social structure. It used the authority of the state and the coercive power of legal institutions to reorganize the relations of production in ways that served the interests of colonial accumulation. This is what the legal theorist Bernard Cohn, writing in the twentieth century, would call the "colonialism of knowledge," the process by which colonial rule imposed new categories, new legal frameworks, and new institutional structures that fundamentally transformed the societies they claimed merely to govern.

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For Siraj Sikder, who was deeply influenced by Mao Zedong's analysis of China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal social formation, the relevance of this jurisprudential history was direct. The class structure that British colonialism had created in Bengal, a structure of landlords living on extracted rent, of a dependent merchant class tied to colonial trade networks, of a landless peasantry, and of a small but growing urban working class, was precisely the kind of social formation that Maoist theory analyzed as requiring a "new democratic revolution" before socialist construction could begin. Sikder's theoretical adaptation of Mao's framework to East Bengal required him to understand the specific historical processes by which Bengal's colonial class structure had been created, and the jurisprudential analysis of the Permanent Settlement and its consequences was central to that understanding.

1.3 The Rise of Bengali Nationalism and the Problem of Political Identity

The experience of colonial rule generated, among the educated Bengali elite, a powerful nationalist consciousness. Bengali nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was a complex phenomenon with multiple currents and contradictions. It was simultaneously a form of resistance to British colonialism and a phenomenon shaped by and partially created through the educational and cultural institutions of that same colonialism.

The Bengali educated elite, known as the bhadralok (literally, "respectable people"), emerged as the primary bearers of Bengali nationalist consciousness. They were educated in British-founded institutions, spoke English as well as Bengali, worked as lawyers, teachers, doctors, and administrators within the colonial system, and developed an ambivalent relationship to colonial modernity. They absorbed certain Enlightenment ideas about rights, progress, and self-governance from their British education, and they used those ideas as weapons against colonial rule itself. This is what the philosopher Partha Chatterjee, in his influential 1986 work "Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World," analyzed as the "derivative discourse" of colonial nationalism: nationalism in the colonized world that simultaneously opposes colonialism and accepts the basic premises of the colonialist's own political philosophy.

Bengali nationalism was further complicated by the question of religion. Bengal's population was roughly equally divided between Hindus and Muslims, with the distribution varying significantly by region. East Bengal, the more rural and economically poorer part of the province, had a Muslim majority, while West Bengal and the major cities, especially Calcutta, were more heavily Hindu. These religious differences overlapped with class differences in ways that generated significant political tension. The bhadralok educated elite was predominantly Hindu. The Muslim peasantry of East Bengal was the most economically exploited class in the society. The relationship between religious identity and class position was not simple or deterministic, but it was real and politically consequential.

The British colonial state, operating through a principle of "divide and rule" that has been extensively documented by historians, actively encouraged religious communalism as a mechanism for preventing the emergence of a unified anti-colonial nationalist movement. The Partition of Bengal in 1905, which the Viceroy Lord Curzon justified on administrative grounds

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but which was widely understood as a political maneuver to divide the Bengali nationalist movement along religious lines, provoked the Swadeshi movement, one of the most significant mass mobilizations of the pre-Gandhian nationalist period. The partition was reversed in 1911, but the damage to communal relations had been done.

For our purposes, the crucial point is that Bengali political identity in the early twentieth century was multiple and contested. There were Bengali nationalists who prioritized Bengali linguistic and cultural unity over religious difference. There were Muslim politicians who prioritized religious solidarity and would eventually support the creation of a separate Muslim state. There were leftists who argued that class, not religion or linguistic nationalism, was the primary category of political analysis. And there were varying positions between and among these poles. Siraj Sikder would have to navigate these competing political identities in his own theoretical and organizational work, and his particular synthesis of Maoist class analysis with Bengali national identity was one of his most distinctive theoretical contributions.

1.4 The Partition of 1947: Colonial Bequest and Its Contradictions

The Partition of British India in 1947 into the independent states of India and Pakistan was one of the most consequential and catastrophic events in modern South Asian history. The human cost of Partition, in terms of the mass violence, the displacement of some fourteen to seventeen million people, and the approximately one to two million deaths that accompanied the drawing of the new boundaries, was staggering. But the political and structural consequences of Partition were equally significant and lasted far longer.

For Bengal, Partition meant a second division of the province, following the failed partition of 1905. Bengal was divided along roughly religious lines into West Bengal (which became part of India) and East Bengal (which became part of Pakistan, initially as East Bengal province and later as East Pakistan). The city of Calcutta, the historic capital of Bengal and its major metropolis, went to India. East Bengal, the more rural and agricultural portion of the province, with its predominantly Muslim population, became part of Pakistan.

The structure of the Pakistani state that emerged from Partition was deeply problematic from the perspective of Bengali interests. Pakistan was conceived and initially governed by a Muslim League elite that was predominantly from the Muslim minority provinces of northern and western India, from regions like the United Provinces and the Punjab. The founding figures of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his associates, were not Bengalis. The national capital was located at Karachi in the west. The Pakistani military was dominated by officers from the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province. And the Urdu-speaking elite from the former Muslim minority provinces of India, who had come to Pakistan as refugees after Partition and who dominated the civil service and political class, had little connection to Bengal or to Bengali culture.

The economic relationship between West Pakistan and East Pakistan was, from the beginning, structured in ways that disadvantaged the eastern wing. East Pakistan, with its jute exports, was

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the primary foreign exchange earner for the new state in the early decades. But the revenues generated by jute were invested primarily in West Pakistan. The new industries, the new universities, the new infrastructure, were built disproportionately in the west. East Pakistan was treated, in economic terms, as a source of revenue to be extracted and a market to be supplied by West Pakistani manufactured goods.

This economic relationship would become central to Siraj Sikder's colonial analysis. When Sikder argued in 1968 that East Bengal was a colony of Pakistan, he was pointing to a real economic relationship in which the resources of the east were being transferred to the west, in which the political and military power of the Pakistani state was being used to maintain this economic relationship against the interests of the Bengali majority, and in which the cultural and linguistic domination of Urdu over Bengali was an expression of the same colonial logic. The analogy with British colonialism was not perfect, but it was not empty either. And for a generation of East Bengali intellectuals and activists who had grown up witnessing the systematic economic marginalization of their region, the colonial frame was a powerful and resonant way of understanding their situation.

1.5 The Language Movement of 1952 and the Emergence of Bengali Political Consciousness

If one event can be identified as the founding moment of modern Bangladeshi political identity, it is the Language Movement (Bhasha Andolan) of 1952. The question at issue seems, on the surface, to be purely cultural: should Urdu, the language of a small minority of Pakistanis but the preferred language of the ruling elite, be the sole official state language of Pakistan, or should Bengali, the language of the majority of Pakistan's population, also have official status?

But the Language Movement was not really about linguistics. It was about power. It was about whether the Bengali majority of Pakistan would be permitted to govern themselves in their own language, to conduct their education and legal affairs and political life in the language that was actually their own, or whether they would be forced to adopt the cultural identity of a ruling class to which they did not belong. The Pakistani state's insistence on Urdu as the sole national language was an assertion of the cultural and political supremacy of the West Pakistani ruling elite over the Bengali majority. It was, in the language that Siraj Sikder would later use, an expression of colonial domination.

On February 21, 1952, police fired on student demonstrators at the University of Dhaka who were marching in defiance of a government order prohibiting public assembly. Several students were killed, including Abul Barkat, Rafiquddin Ahmed, and others. The date of their deaths, February 21, became a sacred date in Bengali political consciousness and is now observed internationally as Mother Language Day. The martyrs of 1952 became the founding figures of a Bengali nationalist movement that would ultimately lead to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

For our analysis of Siraj Sikder, the Language Movement is significant for several reasons. First, it established the legitimacy of mass political resistance against the Pakistani state in the Bengali political consciousness. The idea that the Pakistani state was an oppressive power against which

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resistance was justified was embedded in Bengali political culture from 1952 onwards. Second, the Language Movement showed that students and intellectuals could play a leading role in political mobilization, and the tradition of student activism that it established would be the crucible in which Siraj Sikder's own political formation would take place. Third, the Language Movement raised, without fully resolving, the question of the relationship between Bengali nationalism and left politics: were Bengali national identity and class struggle allies or competitors as foundations for political mobilization?

This question would be central to Sikder's theoretical work. His distinctive answer, derived from his adaptation of Maoist theory, was that the struggle for Bengali national liberation and the class struggle of the proletariat and peasantry were not merely compatible but were aspects of a single revolutionary process at the current historical stage. The national liberation struggle was also a class struggle because the colonial power, West Pakistan, ruled through a class alliance of bureaucratic bourgeoisie and feudal landlords whose interests were opposed to those of the Bengali working people.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EAST PAKISTAN AND THE STRUCTURES OF COLONIAL DEPENDENCE

2.1 Economic Subordination and the Transfer of Resources

The economic relationship between East and West Pakistan has been studied extensively by economists and political scientists, and the evidence for systematic economic disadvantage to East Pakistan is overwhelming. Understanding this relationship in detail is important for evaluating the validity of Siraj Sikder's colonial thesis, which was not merely a rhetorical framing but a substantive analytical claim about the nature of the political economy.

East Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s was responsible for generating the great majority of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings. Jute, the raw fiber used to make sacking, rope, and backing for carpets, was grown almost exclusively in East Bengal. In the early years of Pakistan's existence, raw jute and jute manufactures constituted the largest single source of export earnings for the entire country. But the jute mills were located mostly in West Pakistan and in Calcutta (which was now in India). East Pakistan grew the jute but did not process or profit from its manufacture. The foreign exchange earnings from jute were controlled by the central government in West Pakistan and allocated for development priorities that consistently favored the western wing.

The statistical evidence for this disproportion is substantial. Public investment in West Pakistan consistently exceeded that in East Pakistan, despite the eastern wing having a larger population. The civil service was dominated by West Pakistanis, particularly Punjabis. The military officer corps was almost entirely composed of West Pakistanis. The commercial and industrial elite was concentrated in West Pakistan. The terms of trade between the two wings were consistently

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unfavorable to East Pakistan, which exported cheap agricultural commodities and imported expensive manufactured goods.

Legal and constitutional structures reinforced this economic subordination. The principle of "parity" between the two wings in political representation, introduced in the 1956 Constitution, actually worked against East Pakistan by preventing the Bengali majority from exercising democratic control proportional to their numbers. The central government, controlled by West Pakistani interests, could and did use its constitutional authority to overrule or limit the powers of the East Pakistan provincial government.

2.2 The Class Structure of East Pakistan

The class structure of East Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s was shaped by the long history of colonial rule and the specific conditions of the post-Partition era. Understanding this class structure is essential for understanding the political forces that Siraj Sikder identified and the class alliances that he sought to build.

At the top of the social hierarchy was a small class of large landowners. The zamindari system, created by the Permanent Settlement of 1793, had been formally abolished in East Pakistan in 1950 by the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, but the abolition of formal zamindari did not abolish the concentration of land ownership or the power of the rural elite. Large landlords retained significant landholdings, and the rural social hierarchy remained steep and exploitative.

Below the large landlords were middle peasants, who owned some land but not enough to fully sustain themselves without supplementing their income through other means. Then came the poor peasants, who owned tiny plots of land insufficient to support a family and who depended on renting additional land from landlords or working as agricultural laborers. At the bottom of the rural hierarchy were the landless peasants and agricultural laborers who owned no land at all and survived by selling their labor.

In the urban areas, a small but growing working class was concentrated in the jute mills of Narayanganj, the textile factories of Dhaka, and the port facilities of Chittagong. This industrial working class was small relative to the total population but significant as a political force because of its concentration in specific locations and its experience of collective labor discipline.

A crucial class in the political economy of East Pakistan was the merchant class and the emerging industrial bourgeoisie. Because the West Pakistani and non-Bengali immigrant business class dominated the major commercial and industrial enterprises, the East Bengali merchant class was predominantly engaged in trade, particularly the grain trade and small commodity production. There was a strong link between this merchant class and the Awami League, the major Bengali nationalist political party led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which represented the interests of Bengali business and professional classes in their competition with West Pakistani capital.

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The petty bourgeoisie, including teachers, lower-level civil servants, lawyers, doctors, journalists, and other educated professionals, was large and politically active. This class was the primary constituency of Bengali nationalism, and from it came most of the political leadership of the nationalist movement. Siraj Sikder himself was of petty bourgeois origin, his father being a mid-level government official (a circle officer) from a family with historical zamindar connections. Sikder's ability to analyze his own class position with critical lucidity, to recognize the limitations of petty bourgeois politics while organizing primarily among students and educated youth of similar background, was one of the hallmarks of his theoretical sophistication.

2.3 The Pakistani State and Its Instruments of Control

The Pakistani state used a range of instruments to maintain its dominance over East Pakistan. Understanding these instruments is important for evaluating both the nature of the oppressive system against which Sikder organized and the specific targets that he identified for revolutionary action.

Military force was the ultimate instrument of Pakistani state power, and its use against Bengali political movements was recurrent. The 1952 language movement was met with police firing. In 1954, when the United Front coalition led by Bengali nationalist parties won a decisive electoral victory in the East Pakistan provincial elections, the central government used its constitutional authority to dissolve the provincial government and impose direct central rule. In 1958, a military coup led by General Ayub Khan suspended the constitution, abolished political parties, and established a military dictatorship that would last until 1969. Under Ayub Khan's rule, political opposition in East Pakistan was systematically repressed.

The intelligence apparatus of the Pakistani state was extensive and intrusive. ISPR (Inter-Services Public Relations) and the military intelligence services monitored political activity in East Pakistan. Labor unions, student organizations, and political parties were subject to surveillance and infiltration. Activists could be detained under the Defence of Pakistan Rules, which authorized detention without trial and without judicial review.

The legal framework of Pakistani rule in East Pakistan was itself an instrument of oppression. The Defence of Pakistan Rules, the Public Order Ordinance, and other security legislation gave the state extraordinary powers to detain, restrict, and prosecute political opponents. The legal system, dominated by judges and prosecutors who were either West Pakistani or drawn from the small class of Bengali lawyers who depended on state patronage, was not a reliable protector of political rights.

This experience of legal structures as instruments of oppression rather than as protections of rights is important for the jurisprudential dimension of Sikder's analysis. Sikder was not naive about law. He understood that law in a colonial or class society is not a neutral arbiter but an instrument through which the ruling class maintains its domination. This insight, derived from Marxist legal theory, was confirmed by his direct observation of how the Pakistani legal and administrative system actually functioned in East Pakistan.

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2.4 Political Parties and the Left in East Pakistan

The political landscape of East Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s was complex and contested. Understanding the major political forces and their ideological orientations is essential for understanding the specific political space that Siraj Sikder was trying to occupy with the East Bengal Workers Movement and later the Sarbahara Party.

The Awami League, founded in 1949 by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and others, including the young Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was the dominant Bengali nationalist party. The Awami League's core constituency was the Bengali middle class and the urban professional elite. Its political program emphasized Bengali cultural and linguistic rights, greater provincial autonomy, and equitable distribution of development resources between East and West Pakistan. In its early years, the Awami League had a significant left wing and was formally committed to socialism. But its class base in the merchant and professional middle class meant that its practice was consistently more moderate than its rhetoric. The Awami League led the Six Points Movement of 1966, which demanded a confederation-like arrangement giving East Pakistan almost complete autonomy, and it won the 1970 general election by a massive majority.

The Communist Party of Pakistan and its successor organizations were divided, weakened, and subject to state repression throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The Communist Party, which had been active in East Bengal since the 1930s and had played an important role in labor organizing and peasant movements, was banned by the Pakistani government and operated underground. It was internally divided over ideological questions, particularly the question of whether to follow the Soviet or Chinese line after the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s.

The National Awami Party (NAP), founded in 1957, brought together left-wing nationalists, socialists, and communists in a broad formation that included both Bengali and non-Bengali activists. NAP was itself divided by the Sino-Soviet split, with a pro-Soviet faction (NAP-Moscow, led by Muzaffar Ahmad) and a pro-China faction (NAP-Peking, led by Maulana Bhashani). These factions had very different orientations toward Bengali nationalism and very different theories of revolutionary strategy.

It was into this fragmented and contested left political landscape that Siraj Sikder entered in the mid-1960s. His frustration with the existing communist organizations was not merely personal or organizational. It was theoretical. He believed that all of the existing communist organizations, both pro-Soviet and pro-China, had failed to develop a correct analysis of the fundamental contradictions of East Bengali society, and that this theoretical failure was the root cause of their political ineffectiveness.

CHAPTER THREE: THE EDUCATIONAL FORMATION OF SIRAJ SIKDER

3.1 A Child of Two Worlds: Family Background and Early Socialization

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Sirajul Huq Sikder was born on September 27, 1944, in the village of Lakarta in Bhedarganj Upazilla, Shariatpur District, in what was then British India. The date and precise location of his birth have occasionally been reported differently in various sources, with some giving the date as October 27, 1944, and some placing his birth more specifically in the Shariatpur area, but the weight of authoritative evidence supports the September 27 date.

His family background was complex in ways that shaped his political and intellectual development. His father, Abdur Razzaq Sikder, was a circle officer in the colonial and later Pakistani administrative service, a mid-level government functionary from a family that had historical connections to the zamindar class. The family was of the Bengali Muslim ashraf tradition, with claims to respectable social status based on both landed wealth and education. His sister, Shamim Sikder, would later become a celebrated sculptor and a professor at the University of Dhaka's Faculty of Arts, suggesting a family environment that valued education, culture, and intellectual achievement.

This family background is significant in several respects. First, it placed Siraj Sikder within the Bengali Muslim petty bourgeoisie, the class of educated, government-employed families that was the primary social base of Bengali nationalism and the primary source of the nationalist political leadership. He was not from the working class or the peasantry, and the gap between his class of origin and the sarbahara (proletarian) cause that he would dedicate his life to was something he was acutely aware of and theorized explicitly.

Second, his father's position as a circle officer in the government administration gave young Siraj direct, intimate knowledge of how the colonial and then Pakistani administrative state actually functioned at the ground level. Circle officers were the lowest level of the district administration, responsible for revenue collection and local administrative functions. They were intermediaries between the distant colonial state and the actual villagers. Observing his father's work, Siraj would have seen at close range how the administrative machinery of the state extracted revenue from the peasantry, how it maintained class hierarchies through its decisions and non-decisions, and how it served the interests of the landlord class and the state against those of the poor.

Third, the family's partial connection to the zamindar tradition placed Siraj within a historical lineage that the revolution he sought to lead was explicitly directed against. This is not an insignificant detail. The psychological complexity of a man who comes from a propertied family and organizes for its overthrow, who benefits from class privilege and devotes his life to dismantling the conditions that produce that privilege, is a recurrent feature of revolutionary biography from Lenin to Mao to Che Guevara. In Sikder's case, as in theirs, the biographical tension between class origin and revolutionary commitment generated both motivating energy and certain characteristic political and personal traits.

3.2 Schooling in Barisal: The Formation of a Regional Identity

Siraj Sikder received his early schooling at Barisal Zilla School, from which he passed the matriculation examination in 1959. Barisal was a significant city in the southern Bengal delta, a

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center of river trade and agricultural commerce, with its own distinct cultural and political traditions. The Barisal region, with its thousands of rivers and channels, its predominantly agricultural economy, and its long history of peasant activism, would become one of the core geographic areas of Sikder's revolutionary work.

Barisal Zilla School was one of the established secondary educational institutions of the colonial and post-Partition period, the kind of institution that reproduced the educated Bengali middle class. The curriculum emphasized Bengali language and literature alongside English, mathematics, and the sciences. For a student of Sikder's ability and evident intellectual curiosity, the school environment would have provided access to the canonical texts of Bengali literature and a first exposure to the ideas of the colonial period's reformers and nationalists.

The political atmosphere in Barisal in the 1950s was charged with the aftermath of the Language Movement and the growing Bengali nationalist consciousness that it had generated. Barisal had produced significant figures in Bengali politics and culture, including the poet Jibanananda Das and the nationalist politician A.K. Fazlul Huq. The regional political culture combined Bengali linguistic nationalism with a strong tradition of peasant activism and cooperation movement politics that gave the left a degree of local rootedness.

Completing his matriculation in 1959, Sikder entered Barisal Brojomohun College for his intermediate studies (ISc), completing them in 1961. Brojomohun College, one of the most respected educational institutions in the southern region of East Pakistan, had a student union and political life of its own. The early 1960s were a period of growing political consciousness among Bengali students, shaped by opposition to the Ayub Khan military dictatorship and by the emerging questions about the future of East Pakistan.

3.3 BUET and the Making of an Engineer-Revolutionary

In 1963, Siraj Sikder gained admission to the East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology (EPUET), which would later become the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). This institution, located in Dhaka, was the premier engineering school of East Pakistan and one of the most selective educational institutions in the country.

The significance of Sikder's engineering education for understanding his revolutionary career cannot be overstated. First and most obviously, engineering training gave him a systematic, technical way of analyzing problems, breaking them into components, identifying constraints and resources, and devising solutions. These habits of mind, characteristic of engineering problem-solving, are visible throughout his political and theoretical writings, which are notable for their systematic organization, their explicit identification of contradictions and priorities, and their concern with practical strategy rather than mere theoretical exposition.

Second, the specific discipline of civil engineering, the engineering of built structures, infrastructure, and the physical organization of space, gave Sikder a particular sensitivity to the material conditions of life. Civil engineers think about how people move through space, how

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water is managed, how structures are built and maintained, how physical infrastructure either enables or constrains human activity. This engineering sensibility was relevant to Sikder's revolutionary thinking in quite direct ways. His early attempt to establish a guerrilla base in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, his interest in tunnel construction as a military tactic, and his later emphasis on the importance of establishing rural base areas as the foundation for revolutionary warfare all reflect a civil engineer's attention to the physical geography and infrastructure of the terrain.

Third, BUET in the 1960s was not merely an educational institution but a major site of political activity. The university campus was a hotbed of student politics, with the East Pakistan Student Union (EPSU) and other organizations competing for influence. The EPSU, the student wing of the Communist Party's left, was one of the most significant political organizations on campus. When Siraj Sikder joined the EPSU as a student, he entered one of the most intellectually and politically stimulating environments available in East Pakistan.

3.4 Student Politics and the EPSU: First Encounters with Organized Left Politics

The East Pakistan Student Union in the mid-1960s was an organization in the midst of a profound internal crisis that mirrored the crisis of the communist left globally. The Sino-Soviet split, which had become fully public by 1960 and had divided communist parties around the world, was tearing the EPSU apart. The split was not merely about which foreign country's line to follow. It was about fundamental questions of revolutionary theory and strategy that had enormous practical implications for politics in East Pakistan.

The pro-Soviet faction of the EPSU argued that in the current historical period, the primary task was to build a broad democratic united front against military dictatorship, to support national liberation movements, and to work within the existing framework of constitutional politics to achieve progressive social changes. They drew on the Soviet theory of "peaceful coexistence" and the concept of the "national democratic state" as a transitional form on the road to socialism.

The pro-China faction, with which Sikder aligned himself when the split formalized in 1965, argued that the pro-Soviet line was revisionism, that it was capitulating to imperialism by abandoning the revolutionary road, and that the genuine revolutionary path required a more confrontational, mobilizing approach that drew directly on Mao Zedong's revolutionary theory and practice. The pro-China faction was influenced by the Chinese Communist Party's critique of Soviet "revisionism" and Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" policy, which the Chinese condemned as a betrayal of the revolutionary movements of the Third World.

For Siraj Sikder, the attraction to the pro-China line was not merely a matter of foreign policy alignment. It was about the fundamental question of revolutionary strategy in a predominantly agrarian society with a large peasantry, a small industrial working class, and a history of colonial subordination. Mao Zedong's theoretical work, which had developed a systematic strategy for revolution in precisely these conditions, seemed to Sikder to offer analytical tools far better

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suited to the reality of East Pakistan than the Soviet models that were geared to the conditions of more industrialized societies.

By 1965, when the split in EPSU was formalized, Sikder had become one of the leading figures in the pro-Peking (pro-China) faction. He was elected vice-president of the central committee of the pro-China faction of the Student Union, which indicates that he had already established a reputation as an effective organizer and a serious political thinker within the student movement. This election to a leadership position in a major student organization, at a time when such positions were genuinely contested and carried genuine organizational responsibility, was an important part of Sikder's political education.

3.5 The Intellectual Curriculum of a Young Revolutionary: Key Texts and Influences

To understand Siraj Sikder's political and theoretical formation, it is essential to understand the intellectual world he inhabited as a student at BUET in the mid-1960s. What was he reading? What ideas were circulating in the student left circles to which he belonged? How did the texts he encountered shape the analytical framework he would deploy in his later organizational work?

The foundational texts of Marxist theory, the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, were the common intellectual currency of the left student movement in East Pakistan as elsewhere. Marx's analysis of capitalism in the three volumes of "Capital," his historical materialism as set out in the "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," and the political theory of the "Communist Manifesto" and the "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" were widely read and discussed. Engels's "Anti-Duhring" and "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" were also important texts.

Lenin's works were perhaps even more directly relevant to the political questions facing East Pakistani revolutionaries. Lenin's theory of imperialism, particularly as set out in "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism" (1917), provided a framework for analyzing the relationship between advanced capitalist countries and colonial or dependent territories that was directly applicable to understanding East Pakistan's relationship to the global capitalist system. Lenin's organizational theory, particularly the concept of the "vanguard party" as set out in "What Is To Be Done?" (1902), was the foundation for all subsequent communist organizational practice and was intensely debated within the student left.

But it was the works of Mao Zedong that were most distinctive and most central to Sikder's intellectual formation. Mao's theoretical writings, which had been translated into English and other languages and distributed internationally through the Chinese Foreign Languages Press, offered a systematic framework for revolutionary practice in agrarian, semi-colonial societies that seemed directly applicable to East Pakistan's conditions. Several of Mao's texts were particularly important for Sikder's theoretical development.

"On Practice" and "On Contradiction," both written in 1937, were philosophical works in which Mao elaborated a Marxist epistemology and ontology that emphasized the unity of theory and

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practice and the importance of correctly identifying the principal contradiction in a given situation. The concept of the "principal contradiction," around which so much of Sikder's own theoretical work would revolve, comes directly from these Maoist philosophical texts.

"On New Democracy," written in 1940, provided the political theory of the "new democratic revolution" that was central to Mao's revolutionary strategy. Mao argued that in semi-colonial and semi-feudal countries, the revolutionary process had to pass through a "new democratic" stage before socialist construction could begin. In the new democratic stage, the proletariat and peasantry would lead a united front that also included other anti-feudal and anti-imperialist classes, including the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, against the joint enemies of imperialism and feudalism. Only after the completion of the new democratic revolution would the conditions for socialist revolution be created.

"On Guerrilla War," "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War," and "Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan" were Mao's military theoretical works, which developed the concept of "protracted people's war" and the strategy of "encircling the cities from the countryside." These texts would be directly relevant to Sikder's later military theory and organizational practice.

Beyond Mao, Sikder was reading contemporary theoretical works from the international Maoist movement, documents of the Communist Party of China's polemics against Soviet revisionism, reports from the Cuban Revolution and the Vietnamese resistance, and the theoretical writings of figures associated with the Naxalite movement in West Bengal and India, which had erupted in 1967 and 1968 and represented the most immediately relevant example of a Maoist revolutionary movement in the South Asian context.

3.6 The Naxalbari Uprising and Its Impact on East Pakistani Revolutionary Thought

The Naxalbari uprising of 1967, which began in a small tea-growing area of the Darjeeling district in West Bengal, India, had an immediate and powerful impact on radical politics in East Pakistan and indeed throughout South Asia. Understanding the Naxalbari movement is important for understanding the political context in which Siraj Sikder founded the East Bengal Workers Movement in January 1968.

In May 1967, peasants in the Naxalbari area of the Darjeeling district, organized by Communist Party of India (Marxist) activists who had become disillusioned with what they saw as the CPI(M)'s electoral opportunism and failure to pursue genuine revolutionary politics, began a militant peasant uprising. They seized crops, burned debt records, expelled landlords, and established what they called "liberated zones." The uprising was quickly suppressed by police and paramilitary forces, but it electrified the radical left throughout South Asia and inspired a wave of similar movements.

The founding of the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in November 1967 and the subsequent formation of the Communist Party of India

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(Marxist-Leninist) in 1969 represented the organizational crystallization of the Naxalite movement at the national level. The Naxalite movement explicitly drew on Mao's theory of protracted people's war and the strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside, and it articulated a sharp critique of the CPI(M)'s participation in electoral politics and coalition governments as a betrayal of revolutionary principles.

For East Pakistani activists like Siraj Sikder, the Naxalbari uprising demonstrated that Maoist revolutionary theory was not merely an import from China but could be applied in the specific South Asian context. It showed that poor peasants in agrarian societies similar to East Pakistan's could be mobilized for revolutionary action under the leadership of a committed communist vanguard. It also raised the urgent question of whether similar conditions and similar organizing could produce a revolutionary movement in East Bengal.

Sikder's early attempt, immediately after graduating from BUET in 1967, to establish a guerrilla base in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was directly inspired by the Naxalite example. He took a job in Teknaf, in the southernmost part of Bangladesh, with the specific intention of exploring whether the Hill Tracts could serve as the kind of isolated, mountainous terrain where a guerrilla base area could be established, similar to how the Naxalites were attempting to establish base areas in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. He was also attempting to establish contact with Communist Party activists across the border in Burma (Myanmar), envisioning a possible cross-border revolutionary connection.

This early, practically unsuccessful but theoretically significant attempt at base area development showed the concrete thinking that distinguished Sikder from mere theoretical revolutionaries. He was not content to debate Maoist theory in the seminar rooms and coffee houses of Dhaka. He was actively trying to identify the specific geographic and social terrain in which a Maoist revolutionary strategy could be implemented in East Pakistan's specific conditions.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MARXISM-LENINISM-MAO ZEDONG THOUGHT AND ITS ADAPTATION TO EAST BENGAL

4.1 The Global Context of Maoist Politics in the 1960s

To understand the theoretical framework that Siraj Sikder would develop, it is necessary to understand the broader global context of Maoist politics in the 1960s. This was a period of extraordinary political and theoretical ferment on the international left, shaped by three defining developments: the Sino-Soviet split, the global wave of anti-colonial and national liberation movements, and the Cultural Revolution in China.

The Sino-Soviet split, which became public in 1960 with the Soviet withdrawal of technical advisers from China and the publication of increasingly sharp mutual criticisms by the Chinese and Soviet parties, was a watershed event in the history of world communism. The split was

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partly about personal and national rivalries, partly about genuine political disagreements over foreign policy, and partly about fundamental questions of revolutionary theory. The Chinese critique of Soviet "revisionism" accused the Soviet Union under Khrushchev of abandoning the revolutionary road, of seeking accommodation with imperialism through "peaceful coexistence," of restoring capitalism through "material incentives" and market mechanisms in the economy, and of subordinating the interests of revolutionary movements in the Third World to Soviet state interests.

This critique resonated deeply with activists in the colonial and post-colonial world who felt that the Soviet Union's foreign policy often prioritized great power relations over support for genuine liberation movements. In South Asia, in Latin America, in Africa and the Middle East, communist parties and revolutionary movements had to choose between the Soviet and Chinese lines, and many of the most militant and theoretically sophisticated chose the Chinese line.

The wave of anti-colonial and national liberation movements that swept the Third World in the 1950s and 1960s provided the concrete political context in which Maoist theory was being tested and applied. The Vietnamese National Liberation Front's resistance against American military intervention, the Cuban Revolution, the armed liberation movements in Africa, the Palestinian resistance, all of these were examples of revolutionary struggles in the colonial and post-colonial world that seemed to confirm the relevance of Maoist theory about protracted people's war and the possibility of defeating superior military forces through a combination of guerrilla strategy and mass political mobilization.

The Cultural Revolution in China, which Mao launched in 1966, added another dimension to the global Maoist political landscape. The Cultural Revolution was presented by its instigators as a revolutionary assault on bureaucratic privilege and the restoration of capitalism within the Communist Party itself. It generated enormous enthusiasm among young leftists around the world, who saw in it an attempt to keep the revolutionary process alive against the tendency of successful revolutions to settle into bureaucratic routine. The Little Red Book of Mao's quotations, published in vast quantities during the Cultural Revolution, circulated globally and became a kind of revolutionary catechism for a generation of young leftists.

4.2 The Principal Contradiction Concept: Philosophical Foundations and Political Applications

The concept of the "principal contradiction" is one of the most important theoretical tools in Sikder's political work, and it deserves careful philosophical examination. In his 1968 thesis for the East Bengal Workers Movement, and in subsequent documents, Sikder uses the identification of the "principal contradiction" as the foundation for his analysis of East Bengal's political situation and his derivation of a revolutionary strategy.

The concept comes from Mao's essay "On Contradiction," written in 1937 as part of a philosophical critique of "dogmatism" in Chinese communist circles. Drawing on Hegel's dialectic and Lenin's "philosophical notebooks" on Hegel, Mao argued that reality is

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characterized by multiple contradictions, but that in any given historical period and social formation, one contradiction is primary or "principal" in the sense that its resolution determines the trajectory of social development and the resolution of other contradictions. Identifying the principal contradiction correctly is the foundation of correct political strategy.

Mao distinguished the "principal contradiction" from "secondary contradictions." The principal contradiction is the one that, at the current stage of historical development, has a decisive impact on the existence and development of other contradictions. Secondary contradictions exist and are real, but they are subordinate to and shaped by the principal contradiction. Getting the identification of the principal contradiction wrong means getting the political strategy wrong.

Mao applied this analysis to China's situation in the 1930s and 1940s. During the period of Japanese invasion, he argued, the principal contradiction was between Japanese imperialism and the Chinese nation. This meant that other contradictions, including the class contradiction between the Chinese bourgeoisie and the proletariat, had to be subordinated to the national anti-Japanese struggle. The united front with the Kuomintang, despite the CCP's fundamental disagreement with the Kuomintang's class character, was justified by the necessity of uniting all anti-Japanese forces against the principal contradiction.

After the defeat of Japan, the principal contradiction in China returned to being the class contradiction between the revolutionary forces led by the CCP and the landlord-comprador bourgeoisie represented by the Kuomintang. The united front strategy was then modified to focus on the revolutionary class alliance of workers, peasants, and the urban petty bourgeoisie against the feudal-comprador ruling class.

Siraj Sikder's application of this analytical framework to East Bengal was his most significant theoretical contribution. He argued in 1968 that the principal contradiction in East Pakistan was not, as the pro-Soviet communists claimed, the contradiction between feudalism and the peasantry (calling for an agrarian revolution led by the peasantry under communist leadership), nor was it the contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie (calling for a labor movement and urban-centered politics). The principal contradiction was the national contradiction between the colonial ruling regime of Pakistan (the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and feudal elements of West Pakistan) and the people of East Bengal.

This identification of the principal contradiction had enormous strategic implications. It meant that the immediate revolutionary task was not socialist revolution but national liberation, the separation of East Bengal from Pakistan and the creation of an independent democratic state. It meant that the revolutionary united front should include all classes in East Bengal that had an interest in national liberation, including the national bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, under the leadership of the proletariat and peasantry. And it meant that the revolution's first stage, the "new democratic revolution," would have to be completed before socialist construction could begin.

4.3 Colonial Theory and Its Application to East Bengal: A Jurisprudential Analysis

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The claim that East Bengal was a colony of Pakistan, which was the theoretical foundation of Sikder's entire political project, deserves careful jurisprudential and theoretical analysis. This is not a claim to be accepted or rejected on the basis of mere rhetorical force. It is an analytical proposition about the political economy and legal structure of East Pakistan's relationship to the Pakistani state, and it can be evaluated against both the historical evidence and the existing theoretical frameworks for understanding colonialism.

In international law and political theory, "colonialism" conventionally refers to the domination of one people by another through the instruments of a formally distinct state structure, in which the colonized people are denied political self-determination and subjected to economic extraction for the benefit of the colonizing power. Classical European colonialism, as practiced by Britain, France, the Netherlands, and other European states from the sixteenth through the twentieth century, created formal legal distinctions between the colonizing metropole and the colonized territory, and used the armed force and administrative apparatus of the colonial state to maintain those distinctions.

Pakistan did not fit this model in its formal legal structure. East Pakistan was not a separate legal entity but a province of Pakistan, formally equal in constitutional status to West Pakistan. Bengalis were Pakistani citizens with the same formal legal rights as citizens in the western wing. The Pakistani Constitution did not create formal legal distinctions between Bengali and non-Bengali Pakistanis analogous to the legal distinctions between citizens and colonial subjects in classical European colonies.

But Sikder was not making a point about formal legal structures. He was making a point about substantive political economy and social relations. His colonial thesis drew on a tradition of anti-colonial analysis that had moved beyond formal legal definitions to examine the actual relations of production, extraction, and political domination that characterized the relationship between "metropole" and "periphery" in the colonial and post-colonial world.

This tradition of analysis had several important theoretical antecedents. Lenin's theory of imperialism, developed in 1917, argued that colonialism was an economic relationship of exploitation and extraction that could be maintained through a variety of political forms, not necessarily including formal colonial status. The dependency theorists of the 1950s and 1960s, including Raul Prebisch, Andre Gunder Frank, and others, argued that the global capitalist economy maintained a structural relationship of extraction between "core" capitalist countries and "peripheral" economies that had been shaped by colonialism and continued to reproduce the fundamental inequalities of the colonial period even after formal independence.

For East Pakistan, Sikder's colonial analysis pointed to specific material conditions: the systematic extraction of resources from East to West, the political and military domination of the eastern wing by a ruling class dominated by West Pakistani elements, the cultural and linguistic subordination of Bengali to Urdu, and the use of the state's coercive apparatus to maintain these relationships against the political will of the Bengali majority. These were not formal legal distinctions, but they were real and consequential material relationships.

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The jurisprudential significance of this analysis lies in its implications for the legitimacy of political authority. If the Pakistani state's relationship to East Bengal was colonial in its substance, if it was a relationship of extraction and domination maintained by force rather than consent, then the political authority of that state over East Bengal lacked the legitimacy that, in liberal political theory, requires the consent of the governed. The right to resist colonial domination, recognized even in natural law and international law traditions that are otherwise hostile to revolutionary violence, would then apply to the East Bengali situation.

This was the jurisprudential foundation of Sikder's case for armed revolution. He was not advocating violence for its own sake or out of a romantic attachment to armed struggle. He was arguing that the political conditions in East Bengal, specifically the colonial relationship with West Pakistan maintained by force and denying the Bengali majority their right to self-determination, created a situation in which the conditions for legitimate political authority did not exist, and in which the oppressed people had both the right and the necessity to resort to revolutionary force.

4.4 The Theory of New Democracy: Historical Stages and Revolutionary Strategy

Mao Zedong's theory of "new democracy," as presented in his 1940 essay of that name, provided the framework for Sikder's theory of the revolutionary stages through which East Bengal would need to pass. Understanding this theory in depth is important for understanding both the political strategy of the Sarbahara Party and the theoretical controversies that surrounded it.

Mao's new democratic theory was based on a periodization of world history that divided the modern era into two broad phases: the first, from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution (1789 to 1917), during which the world capitalist system was still in the process of its revolutionary rise against feudalism, and the second, from the Russian Revolution onwards, during which capitalism itself had entered its imperialist stage and a new revolutionary force, the international proletariat led by its communist parties, had emerged as the driving force of world historical progress.

In the first phase, revolutions in colonized countries could still be "bourgeois democratic revolutions" in the old sense, that is, revolutions led by and for the benefit of the national bourgeoisie, aiming at the establishment of a liberal democratic republic. The American and French revolutions were examples of this old form of bourgeois democratic revolution.

In the second phase, however, any genuine anti-imperialist revolution in a colonial or semi-colonial country would have to be part of the world proletarian revolution. It could not be a "purely bourgeois" revolution because the national bourgeoisie of colonized countries was too weak and too compromised by its ties to imperialism to lead a genuine national revolution to completion. Instead, the revolution had to be led by the proletariat and its communist party, in alliance with the peasantry and other progressive forces, and it had to have the character of a "new democratic revolution" directed against imperialism, feudalism, and comprador capitalism.

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The new democratic republic would be neither a capitalist republic of the old type nor a Soviet socialist republic. It would be an intermediate form, a "joint democratic dictatorship of several revolutionary classes," in which political power would be shared among the proletariat, the peasantry, and the progressive sections of the petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie, all united in a revolutionary democratic front. Only after the new democratic stage was completed, and the enemies of imperialism and feudalism were defeated, would the conditions be ripe for the transition to socialism.

Sikder adapted this framework to East Bengal's specific conditions. He argued that East Bengal was at the stage of new democratic revolution, which required the combination of national liberation struggle (against Pakistani colonialism) and democratic revolution (against feudalism and the comprador bourgeoisie). The proletariat and peasantry, under the leadership of the communist party, would lead a united front that could include the national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie in the anti-colonial struggle. But the communist party had to maintain its ideological independence and organizational integrity within the united front, and it had to be prepared to lead the revolution beyond the new democratic stage to socialism when conditions permitted.

This theoretical framework had important implications for the specific organizational and strategic choices that Sikder made. It meant that the Sarbahara Party had to be a disciplined, ideologically coherent vanguard organization rather than a loose popular front. It meant that the party had to develop its organizational presence and military capacity in the rural areas, where the majority of the population lived and where the conditions for a "protracted people's war" were most favorable. And it meant that the party had to resist the temptation to subordinate its revolutionary program to the more limited objectives of the nationalist movement led by the Awami League.

4.5 The Concept of Protracted People's War and Its Application

The military theory of "protracted people's war," developed by Mao Zedong in a series of military theoretical writings from the 1930s and 1940s, was the other major pillar of Sikder's revolutionary strategy. This theory deserves careful analysis both as a military concept and as a political and philosophical framework.

Mao's protracted people's war theory was developed in the specific context of China's revolutionary war, which included the long guerrilla struggle against the Kuomintang from 1927 to 1937 and the resistance against Japanese invasion from 1937 to 1945. But Mao explicitly intended it as a general theory, applicable to the revolutionary conditions of other semi-colonial and agrarian societies.

The core elements of the protracted people's war theory are as follows. First, in a revolutionary war against a superior military power, the weaker revolutionary forces cannot hope to win through a strategy of direct military confrontation. They must fight a war of attrition, a "protracted" war that extends over years or decades, in which the revolutionary forces gradually accumulate strength while the enemy is gradually weakened. Second, the war must be conducted

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primarily in the countryside, where the population is largest and where the revolutionary forces can establish "base areas" protected from the enemy's superior firepower and intelligence. Third, military strategy must be subordinated to political strategy. The purpose of the military struggle is to create the conditions for political mobilization and the building of the revolutionary united front. Military action that is not connected to political mobilization and mass support is adventurism and will fail.

Fourth, the war progresses through three stages. The first stage, strategic defense, is the period when the revolutionary forces are weaker than the enemy and must fight primarily a guerrilla war to preserve their forces, accumulate strength, and wear down the enemy. The second stage, strategic stalemate, is reached when the revolutionary forces have grown sufficiently strong that neither side can decisively defeat the other. The third stage, strategic counteroffensive, comes when the revolutionary forces are strong enough to shift to conventional military operations and seize strategic objectives, leading to final victory.

Fifth, the base area is the key organizational unit of the protracted people's war. The base area is a geographic territory that the revolutionary forces control sufficiently to establish a rudimentary government, build mass organizations, train and arm a people's army, and create the political and economic foundations for sustained revolutionary warfare. The base area is both a military sanctuary and a political laboratory in which the new democratic political order begins to take shape.

The strategy of "encircling the cities from the countryside" is the political-military corollary of the base area concept. Rather than attacking the enemy where it is strongest, in the cities, where its military and administrative power is concentrated, the revolutionary forces establish themselves in the rural areas, where the enemy is weakest, and gradually expand their control outward until the cities are surrounded and can be taken.

Sikder adapted this framework to East Bengal's very specific geographic and social conditions. East Bengal is a river delta, one of the most densely settled and most ecologically complex landscapes in the world. It is not China or Vietnam, with their mountainous terrain suitable for guerrilla hideouts and base areas. The delta landscape of rivers, rice paddies, and dense human settlement presented different military and organizational challenges than the mountain and jungle warfare that Mao and Vo Nguyen Giap had theorized.

Sikder recognized these differences and tried to adapt the general theory to local conditions. His early interest in the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a potential base area reflected his understanding that guerrilla warfare required terrain where conventional military forces were at a disadvantage. His subsequent focus on the river-laced southern districts around Barisal and Jhalokati reflected an adaptation of the base area concept to the delta landscape, where control of waterways and the intricate geography of the river system could provide the equivalent of mountainous terrain in other guerrilla contexts.

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CHAPTER FIVE: THE SINO-SOVIET SPLIT, REVISIONISM, AND THE THEORETICAL FORMATION OF EAST BENGAL MAOISM

5.1 The Sino-Soviet Split: Global Fracture and Local Ramifications

The Sino-Soviet split was not merely a disagreement between two governments. It was a world-historical fracture in the communist movement that forced every communist party, every communist activist, every student left organization around the world to choose between two fundamentally different analyses of the current historical moment, two different theories of revolutionary strategy, and two different visions of what socialism meant in practice. For Siraj Sikder and his generation in East Pakistan, the Sino-Soviet split was the defining political event of their political formation.

The Chinese critique of Soviet "revisionism," which Sikder absorbed and applied in his theoretical writings, had several key components. First, the critique of "peaceful coexistence" as a strategic line that abandoned the revolutionary movements of the Third World in favor of great power accommodation. The Chinese argued that imperialism had not changed its fundamental character, that it remained aggressive and expansionist, and that accommodating it was a betrayal both of the international working class and of the peoples of the colonized world.

Second, the critique of Soviet internal policy as a restoration of capitalism. The Chinese argued that under Khrushchev, the Soviet Union had introduced "material incentive" policies in the economy, rehabilitated "bourgeois" intellectuals and artists, and allowed a bureaucratic elite to entrench itself in positions of power and privilege. These policies, the Chinese argued, amounted to the restoration of capitalism through the back door, to what they called "social imperialism," the exploitation of the working class in the Soviet Union and of developing countries tied to the Soviet economy.

Third, the critique of Soviet organizational practice in the communist movement, specifically the Soviet party's claim to lead all communist parties and its attempt to subordinate other parties' national revolutionary programs to Soviet foreign policy priorities. The Chinese argued that each national communist party had to develop its own revolutionary line on the basis of the specific conditions of its own country, and could not simply follow Soviet instructions.

For East Pakistani Maoists, the Sino-Soviet split had immediate and practical relevance. The pro-Soviet communist organizations in East Pakistan, particularly the Communist Party of Pakistan led by Moni Singh and Mohammed Toha, were following a political line that Sikder and others considered fundamentally flawed. They were oriented toward electoral politics, toward building alliances with the bourgeois nationalist Awami League, and toward a gradualist approach to social change that Sikder considered incapable of addressing the fundamental contradictions of East Bengali society.

The Chinese Cultural Revolution added another dimension to this critique. The Cultural Revolution's assault on bureaucratic privilege and its insistence on continuous revolutionary

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struggle rather than institutional consolidation resonated deeply with young radicals who feared that any successful revolution would eventually succumb to the same bureaucratic ossification that they believed had corrupted the Soviet Union. The Cultural Revolution's emphasis on "putting politics in command," on maintaining ideological commitment against the tendency of technical and administrative expertise to generate a new privileged class, was directly relevant to Sikder's own practice as an engineer who chose revolution over professional advancement.

5.2 The East Pakistan Communist Movement Before Sikder: Organizational Fragmentation and Theoretical Inadequacy

To fully appreciate Sikder's theoretical contribution, it is necessary to understand the specific state of the communist movement in East Pakistan that he was reacting against and attempting to supersede. The existing communist organizations were not merely theoretically inadequate in Sikder's view. They had a specific track record of political failures that he analyzed as the direct consequence of their theoretical errors.

The main communist organizations in East Pakistan in the mid-1960s included the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP), which had been operating underground since it was banned in 1954 and which maintained both pro-Soviet and pro-China factions; the East Pakistan Communist Party (EPCP), led by Moni Singh and focused primarily on the peasant movement in the northern regions; and various student and labor organizations affiliated with these parties or with the broader left.

The CPP's political line in the 1950s and early 1960s had been broadly oriented toward a "national democratic front" strategy, arguing that the primary task in Pakistan was to build a democratic movement against military dictatorship and landlordism. This line led to various forms of collaboration with the Awami League and other nationalist formations, which the pro-China critics argued amounted to subordinating the revolutionary movement to the interests of the national bourgeoisie.

Moni Singh's EPCP, which would later align more clearly with the pro-Soviet line, was deeply rooted in the peasant movement in Mymensingh and the northern districts. It had a strong base among the tea garden workers and peasants of those regions and had maintained an organizational continuity through decades of repression. But Sikder criticized it for failing to develop a correct analysis of the principal contradiction and for following an organizational line that subordinated peasant class interests to the demands of the national democratic front with the bourgeoisie.

Mohammed Toha and the Sirajul Hossain Khan-led organizations, which initially aligned more with the Chinese line, had a complicated relationship with Sikder. He criticized them sharply in his theoretical writings for what he considered their "neo-revisionism," their superficial adoption of Maoist phraseology without the corresponding theoretical rigor and organizational discipline. The document published in 1972 by Sikder on "Exposure of the Draft Strategy and Program of

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the So-Called East Bengal Communist Party" is a sustained polemical critique of what he considered the theoretical inadequacies of these organizations.

These polemics were not merely factional squabbling. They reflected genuine and substantive theoretical disagreements about how to understand the class structure of East Bengali society, what the principal contradiction was, what revolutionary strategy was appropriate, and how the communist party should be organized. Getting these questions right, Sikder argued, was the precondition for building a revolutionary movement that could actually succeed.

5.3 The Question of Revisionism: Philosophical and Political Dimensions

The concept of "revisionism," which is central to Sikder's theoretical vocabulary and to the entire Maoist political tradition, requires careful philosophical examination. The charge of revisionism is not merely a political insult. It is a specific theoretical claim about the relationship between theoretical principles and political practice.

In Marxist theoretical tradition, "revisionism" originally referred to the systematic modification of Marxist theory in directions that reduced or eliminated its revolutionary implications. The original revisionist was Eduard Bernstein, a leading figure in the German Social Democratic Party at the turn of the twentieth century, who argued in his 1899 work "Evolutionary Socialism" that Marx's predictions about the inevitable crisis and collapse of capitalism had not been confirmed by historical experience, that capitalism had shown itself capable of reform and adaptation, and that the working class should therefore pursue its interests through democratic politics and trade union activity rather than revolutionary struggle.

Lenin's response to Bernstein and the revisionists was fundamental to the development of Bolshevik theory and practice. Lenin argued that revisionism was not merely a theoretical error but a form of class capitulation, a surrender to bourgeois ideology that reflected the interests of the "labor aristocracy," the relatively better-off sections of the working class whose privileged position within capitalism gave them a stake in its preservation.

For Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party's critique of the Soviet Union, "revisionism" took on an additional meaning: not just the modification of revolutionary theory in a rightward direction, but the actual restoration of capitalist social relations under the guise of socialist ideology. "Soviet social-imperialism," in the Chinese critique, was the most advanced form of revisionism, in which the revisionist party had actually presided over the restoration of a bureaucratic capitalism and was using the instruments of the Soviet state to pursue imperialist interests in the developing world.

For Siraj Sikder, revisionism had both of these meanings. He applied the charge to communist organizations in East Pakistan that, in his view, had compromised their revolutionary program by making unprincipled alliances with the national bourgeoisie, by abandoning the perspective of armed people's war in favor of parliamentary politics, and by failing to develop a correct analysis of the principal contradiction. In each case, the theoretical error had practical consequences: it

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led to organizational subordination to non-revolutionary forces and to the demobilization rather than the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat and peasantry.

The philosophical dimension of Sikder's anti-revisionism is important. He was not arguing for theoretical rigidity or doctrinal conformism. He explicitly insisted, following Mao, that revolutionary theory must be applied "concretely," that is, with attention to the specific conditions of the particular society being analyzed, rather than mechanically imported from other contexts. The accusation against the revisionists was precisely that they were applying imported formulas mechanically rather than developing a theoretically rigorous analysis of East Bengal's specific conditions.

5.4 The Concept of Bureaucratic Bourgeoisie and Comprador Capital

Two concepts that are central to Sikder's class analysis of East Bengal deserve specific examination: the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" and "comprador capital." These are concepts derived from Maoist political economy, but they have specific content in the East Bengali context.

The "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" in Mao's analysis of China referred to the class that controlled the Chinese state apparatus under the Nationalist (Kuomintang) government, a class that derived its wealth and power not from independent productive activity but from its control of state power, which it used to extract resources from the economy through bureaucratic means. The bureaucratic bourgeoisie was distinguished from the "national bourgeoisie," which was an independent productive class engaged in manufacturing and trade and which, despite its fundamental class antagonism with the proletariat, could in the current period be part of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal united front.

In Sikder's application to East Bengal's situation, the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" referred specifically to the West Pakistani elite that dominated the Pakistani state apparatus. This was the class that extracted resources from East Bengal through its control of taxation, import-export licensing, state credit allocation, and other administrative mechanisms. It was the class that allocated development resources disproportionately to West Pakistan. It was the class whose interests were served by the suppression of Bengali nationalist and labor movements.

"Comprador capital" referred to the local capital that served as an intermediary for foreign or in this case West Pakistani capital, facilitating its extraction of surplus from East Bengal. The comprador bourgeoisie in East Bengal was the class of importers, agents, and middlemen who profited from trading in goods produced elsewhere while the local productive forces were underdeveloped. Unlike the national bourgeoisie, the comprador bourgeoisie had no interest in the development of independent national productive capacity and was therefore an enemy of the national democratic revolution rather than a potential ally.

This class analysis had direct political implications. It meant that the Awami League, representing primarily the interests of the national bourgeoisie and the professional middle class, could be part of the revolutionary united front at certain stages but was not a reliable long-term

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ally of the proletarian revolutionary movement. The Awami League's ultimate objective was not social revolution but the creation of conditions in which the Bengali national bourgeoisie could compete on equal terms with West Pakistani capital and accumulate its own share of the surplus generated in East Bengal. This was a limited, class-specific objective that the revolutionary communist movement could not allow to become the terminus of the national liberation struggle.

CHAPTER SIX: THE FOUNDING OF THE EAST BENGAL WORKERS MOVEMENT: ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY AND REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICE

6.1 The Decision to Found a New Organization: Theoretical Rationale and Historical Context

On January 8, 1968, Siraj Sikder and a group of like-minded activists founded a clandestine organization named the Purba Bangla Sramik Andolon, the East Bengal Workers Movement (EBWM). The founding meeting was held at the residence of a jute mill worker in Dhaka, attended by forty-five to fifty followers of the Mao Tse Tung Thought Research Centre that Sikder had established in 1967. The choice of a jute mill worker's home as the founding venue was itself a political statement, symbolically connecting the new organization to the working class it claimed to represent.

The decision to found a new organization rather than to work within the existing left formations, or to join the pro-China faction of the National Awami Party or the various groups that had split from the established communist parties, reflected Sikder's fundamental judgment that all existing organizations were theoretically inadequate and therefore politically incapable of leading a successful revolution. This was a momentous decision with profound implications. It meant building a new organizational capacity from scratch, which required enormous investments of time, energy, and resources. It meant competing with established organizations for the political loyalty of activists and supporters. And it meant accepting the costs of organizational marginality during the initial period of building.

The theoretical rationale for this decision was set out in the founding thesis of the EBWM, a lengthy document dated December 1, 1968 (though first published in January 1968 in an earlier form), that remains one of the most important documents in the history of East Bengali revolutionary politics. This document, "How Shall We Apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought to the Condition of Revolution of Our Country," is Sikder's first major theoretical statement and deserves careful analysis.

6.2 The Founding Thesis of the EBWM: A Close Reading

The EBWM founding thesis begins with a methodological statement that reveals the fundamental orientation of Sikder's theoretical approach. He writes that Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought is "the arrow" that must be aimed at the specific target of the revolution of East Bengal,

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and that those who "throw the arrow aimlessly" do harm to the revolution. This metaphor expresses the core of the Maoist approach to the application of revolutionary theory: theory must be applied concretely, with attention to the specific conditions of the particular society, not mechanically imported from foreign contexts.

The document then proceeds to identify the contradictions of East Bengali society. The EBWM thesis identified four major contradictions: between Pakistani colonialism and the people of East Bengal; between feudalism and the peasants of East Bengal; between the various forms of imperialism (American, Soviet, and Indian) and the people of East Bengal; and between the bourgeoisie and the workers of East Bengal. Among these, the thesis argued, the principal contradiction was the first, between Pakistani colonialism and the people of East Bengal.

This identification of the principal contradiction was, as noted above, Sikder's most distinctive and consequential theoretical contribution. It distinguished him from the mainstream of the South Asian Maoist movement, which generally identified the principal contradiction as feudalism versus the peasantry (following the line of the Indian Naxalites). Sikder's argument was that in East Bengal's specific conditions, where the primary form of exploitation was colonial extraction by West Pakistan rather than feudal exploitation by local landlords, the correct identification of the principal contradiction pointed to national liberation as the immediate revolutionary task.

The strategic implications were drawn out explicitly. If the principal contradiction was colonial, then the immediate objective of the revolution was to establish an independent, democratic, peaceful, non-aligned, and progressive People's Republic of East Bengal. This objective could unite all classes in East Bengal that were oppressed by Pakistani colonialism: the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, and even sections of the national bourgeoisie. The united front had to be led by the proletariat and its communist party, but it was a broad alliance against the colonial enemy.

The document also addressed the question of revolutionary strategy. It clearly endorsed the Maoist strategy of "protracted people's war," arguing that the revolution must be based in the rural areas, that a people's army must be built from the revolutionary masses, and that the strategy must be to "encircle the cities from the countryside." This strategic orientation was directly derived from Mao's military theory and from the practice of revolutionary movements in China, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

What is notable about the EBWM founding thesis, beyond its substantive theoretical content, is its rhetorical and organizational character. It is a document designed not just to state theoretical positions but to distinguish the EBWM from other organizations, to demarcate its political line clearly against alternatives, and to provide a clear programmatic basis for organizational recruitment and cadre development. The explicit criticism of other left organizations, the careful delineation of the "correct" line against various forms of "revisionism" and "opportunism," and the programmatic clarity about objectives and strategy are all characteristic of the Leninist organizational model that Sikder was following.

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6.3 The Mao Tse Tung Thought Research Centre: Pedagogy, Theory, and Organizational Formation

Before the formal founding of the EBWM, Siraj Sikder had established the Mao Tse Tung Chintadhara Gobeshonakendra, the Mao Tse Tung Thought Research Centre, in Dhaka in 1967. This organization, which served as the seedbed from which the EBWM would grow, was primarily an educational and theoretical enterprise, a space for serious collective study and discussion of Maoist theory with the specific purpose of determining how that theory should be applied to East Bengal.

The Research Centre was subjected to physical attacks by cadres of Jamaat-e-Islami, the major Islamist political party, on several occasions. These attacks reflected the deep hostility between the Islamist right and the communist left in East Pakistan, and also the seriousness with which the Islamist organizations took the threat posed by the growing Maoist movement. The willingness of the Research Centre members to maintain their activities in the face of this physical intimidation demonstrated the commitment and courage that would later characterize the EBWM and the Sarbahara Party.

The Ayub Khan government eventually closed down the Research Centre, under pressure from religious conservatives who objected to the propagation of communist ideas on Pakistani soil. This closure, while a setback, also clarified for Sikder and his associates that the Pakistani state was fundamentally hostile to any independent radical political activity and that any serious revolutionary organization would have to function clandestinely.

The research and study that took place within the Centre before its closure was the theoretical foundation for all of Sikder's subsequent political work. The collective study of Marxist texts, the application of Maoist analytical categories to East Bengal's specific conditions, the debates over the principal contradiction and the correct revolutionary strategy, were all preparation for the more practically oriented work of the EBWM.

6.4 Organizational Principles and Party Building: The Leninist Model in the East Bengali Context

The organizational model that Sikder adopted for the EBWM and subsequently for the Sarbahara Party was derived from Lenin's theory of the vanguard party, as elaborated in "What Is To Be Done?" and subsequently refined in the "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder" and the writings on party organization from the Bolshevik experience.

The Leninist vanguard party is characterized by several distinctive features. First, it is a party of professional revolutionaries, people who devote their entire lives to the revolutionary cause and who maintain a disciplined organizational commitment that ordinary political party members cannot or need not maintain. The professional revolutionary is distinguished from the "class-conscious worker" or the progressive intellectual who supports the revolutionary cause but cannot make the full organizational commitment.

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Second, the Leninist party operates according to the principle of "democratic centralism," under which decisions are made through democratic discussion within the party but are then binding on all members and must be implemented as centrally directed. Democratic centralism is designed to combine the benefits of collective deliberation, through which the best analysis emerges from the confrontation of different views, with the benefits of organizational cohesion and discipline, which are necessary for effective action.

Third, the Leninist party maintains a strict commitment to ideological clarity and theoretical correctness, distinguishing itself from other organizations through the quality and rigor of its theoretical analysis. Theoretical struggle, the explicit debate and confrontation of different positions, is considered essential to maintaining the correct political line.

Fourth, the Leninist party operates clandestinely when necessary, maintaining the security of its organization against state repression through compartmentalization, the use of aliases, and strict control of information within the organization.

Sikder added to this Leninist organizational model the specific features of Maoist party building in a guerrilla war context: the three-in-one structure of party committee, people's army, and people's government at each level of organization; the mass line principle of "from the masses, to the masses"; and the integration of political and military work within a single organizational structure.

The application of these organizational principles in East Pakistan's specific conditions was challenging in multiple ways. The population was predominantly rural and illiterate, making the rapid dissemination of theoretical documents and the recruitment of educated cadres difficult. The state's repressive apparatus made clandestine organization dangerous. The competition with established left organizations for politically conscious activists was intense. And the physical geography of the river delta made communication and coordination across the organization difficult.

6.5 The Student Milieu and the Sources of Revolutionary Cadres

The primary social base for the EBWM's initial recruitment was the student milieu of Dhaka's universities and colleges. This reflected both the practical availability of this social layer, concentrated in educational institutions and politically active, and the longer-term challenge that Sikder recognized: how to build a revolutionary organization that was genuinely rooted in the working class and peasantry rather than remaining an organization of intellectuals and students.

The student left in Dhaka in the late 1960s was a densely organized and highly politicized milieu. The East Pakistan Student Union, the student union affiliated with the mainstream left, and the East Pakistan Student League, the student wing of the Awami League, were the two largest student political organizations. But there were numerous smaller groups, study circles, and political cells associated with the various tendencies of the communist left. These smaller formations were the primary recruiting ground for the EBWM.

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The profile of the initial EBWM cadres reflects the social composition of this student milieu. They were predominantly young men from the petty bourgeoisie or lower middle class, with secondary or tertiary education. They had passed through the political experience of the Language Movement's legacy, through the repression of the Ayub Khan military dictatorship, and through the intellectual engagement with Marxist theory that was characteristic of the radical student movement. They were attracted to the EBWM because its theoretical clarity and organizational seriousness distinguished it from other organizations, and because its commitment to genuine revolutionary change corresponded to their own political aspirations.

The challenge of expanding beyond this student base to build genuine roots in the working class and peasantry was one that Sikder took very seriously and addressed both theoretically and organizationally. His insistence that cadres "integrate with the masses," go to the rural areas and live and work among the peasants, was directly derived from Mao's "mass line" philosophy and from the practical lessons of successful revolutionary movements. The Maoist concept of the mass line, "from the masses, to the masses," meant that the party's political line should be derived from systematic attention to the needs and aspirations of the masses themselves, not merely imposed from above by an educated vanguard.

6.6 The EBWM and the 1969 Mass Uprising

The period from 1968 to 1969 was one of the most politically explosive in East Pakistan's history. The mass uprising of 1969, known as the Gono Obbhuthan (people's uprising), overthrew Ayub Khan's military government and created a brief interlude of open political activity before military rule was reimposed under General Yahya Khan. The uprising also crystallized the political forces that would drive the independence movement of 1971.

The 1969 uprising was triggered by a combination of economic grievances and political demands. The Awami League's Six Points demand for provincial autonomy, the demands of the left for land reform and social transformation, and the universal demand for an end to military dictatorship converged in a massive popular mobilization that swept through both urban and rural East Pakistan. Student organizations played a central role in organizing and leading the protests.

For the EBWM, the 1969 uprising was both an opportunity and a test. The opening of political space created opportunities for recruitment and for propagating the EBWM's political line more broadly. But the uprising also posed the strategic question of how the EBWM should relate to the broader movement, which was dominated by the Awami League and the mainstream left. Should it join the united front of all opposition forces? Should it maintain its organizational independence at the risk of marginality? Should it try to push the movement in a more radical direction?

Sikder's position, consistent with his theoretical framework, was that the EBWM should actively participate in the anti-Ayub movement while maintaining its organizational independence and its distinct political line. It should neither isolate itself from the mass movement nor dissolve its

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independent identity within the broader Awami League-led coalition. This position was easier to state than to implement in the heat of a rapidly moving mass movement, and the tensions between maintaining ideological independence and engaging with the actual dynamics of the popular movement were a persistent challenge.

6.7 The 1970 General Election and its Aftermath: Strategic Juncture for East Bengali Revolution

The general election of December 1970, the first general election held in Pakistan under conditions of universal adult suffrage, was a watershed moment in South Asian political history. The Awami League, running on its Six Points platform of provincial autonomy, won a massive majority, taking 160 of the 162 seats in East Pakistan and giving it an overall majority in the National Assembly. In West Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party won a majority of the West Pakistani seats.

The refusal of Bhutto and the military establishment to allow the Awami League to form a government on the basis of its election victory, and the subsequent launch of "Operation Searchlight" by the Pakistani military on the night of March 25-26, 1971, transformed the political situation fundamentally and created the conditions for the liberation war.

For Siraj Sikder and the EBWM, the 1970 election was a complex political event. On one hand, the Awami League's massive electoral victory demonstrated the overwhelming popular desire for Bengali self-determination, confirming the EBWM's analysis that the national contradiction was the principal one. On the other hand, the election also demonstrated the enormous political dominance of the Awami League and the marginality of the revolutionary left in the formal political arena.

Sikder did not see the election as a legitimate path to liberation. His analysis was that genuine independence, let alone social revolution, could not be achieved through the mechanisms of the Pakistani constitutional order, which was controlled by the West Pakistani military establishment and which could be, and as events proved would be, suspended whenever it produced results inconvenient to the ruling class. The electoral victory of the Awami League was a demonstration of Bengali national consciousness, but it would ultimately have to be secured through people's war rather than parliamentary politics.

When Operation Searchlight was launched in March 1971 and the military began its genocidal assault on the Bengali population, Sikder and the EBWM were faced with the immediate practical question of how to respond. Unlike the mainstream nationalist forces, which organized under the banner of the Awami League and operated in coordination with the Indian military, the EBWM sought to build an independent revolutionary military force based in the rural areas of the south, particularly around Barisal and the Jhalokati district.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: THE ETHICS OF REVOLUTION AND THE JURISPRUDENCE OF LIBERATION

7.1 Revolutionary Ethics: The Problem of Political Violence

The most philosophically challenging and politically contentious dimension of Siraj Sikder's legacy is the question of revolutionary violence. This question cannot be avoided in any serious engagement with his life and work, and it requires careful philosophical and jurisprudential analysis that goes beyond simple condemnation or apologia.

The use of political violence is a fundamental problem in moral and political philosophy. The philosophical tradition offers several distinct frameworks for analyzing this problem, each with different implications for evaluating revolutionary violence specifically.

Just war theory, which has its origins in the works of Augustine and Aquinas and was systematically developed in the early modern period by figures like Francisco de Vitoria and Hugo Grotius, provides one framework. According to just war theory, violence is morally justified only when it meets specific criteria: it must be for a just cause (defense against aggression or serious injustice), it must be a last resort after other means have been tried and failed, it must be authorized by a legitimate authority, it must have a reasonable prospect of success, and it must be conducted by methods that are proportionate and that avoid unnecessary harm to non-combatants.

Applied to Sikder's revolutionary violence, the just war framework generates mixed conclusions. The "just cause" criterion is complex: if the colonial relationship between West Pakistan and East Bengal was genuinely unjust and if the Pakistani state was engaged in the violent suppression of legitimate political expression, then resistance to this oppression could arguably constitute a just cause. The "last resort" criterion is also complex: the history of nonviolent political protest in East Pakistan, including the Language Movement and the mass mobilizations of 1969, had not succeeded in achieving the Six Points demands, and the Pakistani state's resort to mass violence in 1971 suggested that peaceful means were being violently foreclosed.

The Kantian tradition in moral philosophy offers a different framework. Kant's categorical imperative, in its most basic formulation, requires that one act only according to maxims that one could consistently will to be universal laws. Applied to revolutionary violence, the Kantian question would be whether one could consistently will that all oppressed peoples resort to violence against their oppressors. The difficulty with the Kantian framework is that it is essentially procedural; it tells us to apply the test of universalizability but does not provide a substantive answer to the question of when violence is justified.

Consequentialist frameworks, particularly utilitarian theory, evaluate the moral status of actions by their consequences, specifically by whether they produce more happiness or well-being than alternative actions. Applied to revolutionary violence, the consequentialist question is whether the violence produces more good (in terms of liberation from oppression, social justice, human

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flourishing) than the alternatives, taking into account both the direct harms of violence and the harms of continued oppression. The difficulty is that consequentialist calculations are always uncertain: the outcomes of revolutionary violence are hard to predict, and the harms of violence in the short term may not be outweighed by the benefits of liberation in the long term.

7.2 Marxist Jurisprudence and the Theory of Law in Class Society

Siraj Sikder's practice was informed by a specific theory of law and legal authority that deserves systematic examination. The Marxist tradition in legal theory, which runs from Marx's own occasional comments on law through Lenin's more developed discussion in "The State and Revolution" to the more systematic work of Soviet jurists like Evgeny Pashukanis and the later contributions of Western Marxist legal theorists, offers a distinctive perspective on the nature and function of legal authority.

For Marx, law is a superstructural phenomenon, a part of the ideological and institutional framework that arises on the basis of and in correspondence with the economic base, the mode of production and the property relations that characterize it. This does not mean that law is simply a direct expression of the economic interests of the ruling class, though this is the vulgar Marxist position. Marx recognized that law has a certain relative autonomy from the economic base and can serve functions, including functions of social coordination and conflict resolution, that are not immediately reducible to the interests of the ruling class.

But the fundamental point of the Marxist analysis is that in a class society, the legal order reflects and reinforces the property relations of that society. Law protects private property, which under capitalism means the property of the capitalist class. Law enforces contracts, which under capitalism are the mechanism through which workers sell their labor power to capitalists. Law defines and enforces rights, which in bourgeois society are primarily rights of property and contract that serve the interests of the propertied classes.

Lenin's "The State and Revolution" (1917) pushed this analysis in a more directly political direction. Lenin argued that the state, and the legal order it enforces, are ultimately instruments of class domination. The state is not a neutral arbiter between classes but an instrument through which the ruling class maintains its domination over the oppressed classes. In capitalist society, the state is the executive committee of the bourgeoisie. In this context, the law is ultimately backed by the coercive force of the state: its police, its courts, its prisons, and ultimately its army.

Pashukanis, in his "General Theory of Law and Marxism" (1924), offered a more sophisticated analysis of the specific form of bourgeois law, arguing that the legal form, the form of rights-bearing legal subjects engaging in contractual relations, corresponds specifically to the commodity form of capitalist economic relations. In capitalism, social relations take the form of relations between possessors of commodities who exchange them as equal values. Law gives this economic relation its political and normative form: the legal subject is an abstract equal, a bearer

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of rights, who enters into contracts with other legal subjects. But this abstract legal equality conceals the real social inequality between workers and capitalists in the sphere of production.

For Sikder, these theoretical insights were not merely academic. They were practically relevant to understanding why the legal institutions of the Pakistani state could not be relied upon to deliver justice to the Bengali people. The Pakistani Constitution, the courts, the bureaucracy, the police, were not neutral institutions that could be appealed to against colonial exploitation. They were instruments of the colonial order, designed to maintain the dominance of the West Pakistani ruling class. Justice for the Bengali people could not be achieved through the mechanisms of colonial law but only through the revolutionary overthrow of the colonial order itself.

7.3 The Right of Revolution in Political Philosophy and International Law

The concept of a "right of revolution," the idea that a people has a moral and perhaps even a legal right to overthrow a government that systematically violates their fundamental rights or that rules without legitimate authority, has a long and complex history in political philosophy and international law. This concept is directly relevant to evaluating the jurisprudential basis of Sikder's revolutionary project.

In the natural law tradition, beginning with John Locke's "Second Treatise of Government" (1689), the right of revolution is grounded in the concept of consent. Legitimate political authority, for Locke, derives from the consent of the governed. When a government systematically violates the natural rights of its citizens, when it acts contrary to the public good and to the purpose for which government is established, the people have both the right and the obligation to resist and to replace it. Locke's theory was, of course, originally developed in the context of seventeenth-century English constitutionalism and was directed against absolute monarchy rather than colonial domination. But its logic was extended and applied to colonial contexts by later thinkers, including the American revolutionaries of 1776, who drew on Lockean natural rights theory to justify their revolt against British rule.

The principle of self-determination of peoples, which developed in international law from the nineteenth century onwards and was given formal recognition in the United Nations Charter of 1945, provides another legal framework for evaluating the legitimacy of liberation struggles. Article 1 of the UN Charter includes among the purposes of the United Nations "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples." The subsequent Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (General Assembly Resolution 1514 of 1960) stated explicitly that "all peoples have the right to self-determination" and that the denial of this right "constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights."

East Bengal's situation presented complex questions from the perspective of international law on self-determination. The principle of self-determination in international law was primarily developed to address the specific situation of overseas European colonialism, in which a European metropolitan power ruled a geographically distant and ethnically distinct territory. The

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Pakistani situation, in which one region of a formally unitary state was dominated by another region of the same state, did not fit neatly into this framework. Moreover, the international community was generally reluctant to recognize the right of internal self-determination, that is, the right of a region of a state to secede from it, for fear of the destabilizing precedent this might set.

Nevertheless, the substantive conditions in East Pakistan, particularly after the military launched its genocidal assault in March 1971, created a situation in which the moral case for self-determination was overwhelming, even if the formal legal framework for recognizing it was uncertain. The Pakistani military's deliberate killing of hundreds of thousands of Bengali civilians, its rape of thousands of women, its burning of villages and cities, constituted crimes against humanity by any reasonable standard of international law. In the face of such state violence, the right to armed resistance was not merely a revolutionary slogan but a principle recognized in the most basic frameworks of international humanitarian law.

7.4 Fanon, Gramsci, and the Decolonization of Political Theory

Siraj Sikder's theoretical framework, while primarily derived from the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist tradition, also resonated with and drew on broader currents of anti-colonial political theory that were circulating in the 1960s. Two figures are particularly relevant: Frantz Fanon and Antonio Gramsci, though the direct evidence of Sikder's engagement with Gramsci is limited, the structural parallels between Gramscian concepts and aspects of Sikder's political practice are significant.

Frantz Fanon, the Martinique-born psychiatrist, theorist of colonialism, and activist in the Algerian liberation struggle, published his major works "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) and "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) in the period when Sikder was forming his political ideas. "The Wretched of the Earth," with its analysis of the psychology of colonial domination and its controversial defense of anticolonial violence as a form of "cleansing" that allows the colonized to reclaim their humanity, was one of the most influential texts of the anti-colonial movement of the 1960s.

Fanon's analysis of the "national bourgeoisie" in post-colonial countries is particularly relevant to understanding Sikder's critique of the Awami League. Fanon argued that the nationalist leadership that inherits power from the departing colonial power is typically a class that has internalized the values and aspirations of the colonial bourgeoisie. It wants to replace the colonizer's economic dominance with its own, to become the new exploiting class rather than to transform the social structure in the interests of the poor majority. The national bourgeoisie, in Fanon's analysis, is a "get rich quick" class rather than a transformative revolutionary force.

This analysis maps almost perfectly onto Sikder's critique of the Awami League government after Bangladeshi independence. His characterization of the Mujib government as an "agent of Indian expansionism" that had betrayed the liberation struggle and was establishing a new form of class exploitation in place of the old Pakistani colonial exploitation drew on the same

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fundamental insight as Fanon's analysis of the post-colonial national bourgeoisie, though expressed in the Maoist theoretical vocabulary of "new colonialism" and "comprador bourgeoisie."

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist theorist who developed the concept of "hegemony" while imprisoned by Mussolini's regime, offers a different but complementary set of analytical tools. Gramsci's concept of hegemony refers to the way in which ruling class dominance is maintained not only through direct coercion but through the construction and maintenance of consent. The ruling class exercises hegemony when its particular class interests are successfully presented as universal interests, when its cultural values and political ideas are accepted as common sense by the subordinate classes.

The concept of hegemony has direct relevance to understanding the political situation of the Bengali masses under both Pakistani rule and the post-independence Awami League government. Pakistani domination was maintained partly through force but also through the ideological hegemony of Pakistani nationalism and Islamic identity, which sought to present the unity of Pakistan as a common interest overriding Bengali particular interests. Similarly, Awami League dominance in post-independence Bangladesh was maintained partly through its genuine popularity as the party of liberation but also through ideological mechanisms that prevented the articulation of class interests against the new ruling class.

The counter-hegemonic project, in Gramscian terms, requires building an alternative "bloc" of social forces, creating new organic intellectuals from the subordinate classes who can articulate a different set of interests and values, and developing a counter-culture that challenges the ideological hegemony of the ruling class. This is a recognizable description of what Sikder was attempting to do with the EBWM and the Sarbahara Party, even if he would not have used Gramscian vocabulary to describe it.

CHAPTER EIGHT: HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS AND COMPARATIVE REVOLUTIONARY THEORY

8.1 The Chinese Revolution and Its Lessons for East Bengal

Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary victory in 1949 was the primary historical model and inspirational reference for Siraj Sikder's political project. But the relationship between the Chinese revolutionary experience and the East Bengal situation was not one of simple imitation. Sikder was sophisticated enough to recognize that East Bengal was not China, and that the specific lessons of the Chinese revolution had to be carefully translated and adapted to East Bengal's very different conditions.

The similarities between China in the 1930s and 1940s and East Bengal in the 1960s were real but limited. Both were predominantly agrarian societies with large peasant majorities, small but

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growing urban working classes, and significant feudal or semi-feudal land relations. Both were subjected to forms of imperialism and domination by external powers that extracted surplus from the local economy and prevented the development of independent national productive capacity. Both had small communist parties that were attempting to build revolutionary movements in conditions of state repression.

The differences were equally significant. China was a vast country with enormous geographic diversity, including mountainous regions that provided ideal terrain for guerrilla warfare and base area construction. East Bengal was a small, densely populated river delta with minimal terrain suitable for conventional guerrilla operations. China had a history of political fragmentation and warlordism that had weakened the capacity of any single political authority to control the entire territory. East Pakistan, while politically dominated by West Pakistan, was a coherent provincial unit with a functioning, if oppressive, state administration. The Chinese peasantry, in the areas where the CCP established its base areas, had experience of extreme exploitation by local landlords and warlords; the East Bengali peasantry, while severely exploited, operated within a somewhat different social structure.

These differences required that Sikder adapt rather than simply apply the Chinese model. His identification of East Bengal's river delta geography as a potential base area environment, his emphasis on the specific class dynamics of the Bengali peasantry and agricultural laborers, and his analysis of the national rather than merely class character of the principal contradiction all reflected attempts to develop a Maoist strategy appropriate to East Bengal's specific conditions.

8.2 The Vietnamese Revolution and Protracted Resistance

The Vietnamese revolution, particularly the resistance against American military intervention from the early 1960s onwards, provided another major historical reference point for Sikder and the broader Maoist movement of the 1960s. The Vietnamese struggle seemed to confirm the validity of the protracted people's war theory in practice: a small, underdeveloped country was successfully resisting the military might of the world's most powerful state through a combination of guerrilla strategy, mass political mobilization, and unyielding national and revolutionary will.

Several specific lessons from the Vietnamese experience were relevant to Sikder's strategic thinking. The importance of political work among the masses, not just military action, was demonstrated by the NLF's success in building and maintaining a mass political base despite the enormous destructive power of American military force. The "three-in-one" organizational structure, combining party organization, people's army, and people's government at each level, was directly adapted by Sikder for the Sarbahara Party. The integration of national liberation with social revolution, the combination of anti-imperialist struggle with agrarian reform, was the Vietnamese model that Sikder sought to replicate in East Bengal.

The geographic differences between Vietnam and East Bengal were again significant. Vietnam's mountainous and jungle terrain provided natural protection for guerrilla forces and base areas

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that the flat river delta of East Bengal could not offer. But Sikder drew from the Vietnamese experience the more general lesson that determined political will, organizational discipline, and correct strategy could compensate for military inferiority.

8.3 The Cuban Revolution and Foco Theory: A Critical Engagement

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the "foco" theory derived from it by Ernesto Che Guevara and the French theorist Regis Debray represent a third major point of reference in the revolutionary theory of the 1960s, though one that Sikder engaged with critically rather than approvingly.

The foco theory, as elaborated in Debray's "Revolution in the Revolution?" (1967), argued that in Latin America the conditions for revolution were already present and that the decisive factor was the creation of a small, highly mobile armed vanguard (foco) that would ignite the revolutionary conflagration by its actions. The foco did not need a mass political party organization before beginning armed struggle; its military actions would themselves create the conditions for mass mobilization by demonstrating the vulnerability of the state and inspiring the oppressed masses to join the struggle.

This theory was in sharp conflict with the Maoist model of patient mass organization, united front politics, and base area construction. Mao himself was critical of what he called "adventurism," the substitution of armed action by a small vanguard for the patient building of mass political consciousness and organization. The foco theory, in the Maoist critique, was an adventurist deviation that put the cart before the horse, beginning with armed action without the political foundations necessary for sustained revolutionary struggle.

The practical record of foco-inspired revolutionary attempts in Latin America appeared to confirm the Maoist critique. Che Guevara's own attempt to apply the foco theory in Bolivia in 1967 ended in disaster, with Guevara's capture and execution and the decimation of his small guerrilla force. Subsequent foco-inspired attempts in various Latin American countries similarly failed to generate the mass mobilization their proponents expected.

Sikder's critique of the existing communist organizations in East Pakistan included elements of the anti-foco critique. He was sharply critical of what he saw as adventurist tendencies in other Maoist organizations that rushed into armed actions without the political foundation of mass organization and correct line. His insistence on the primacy of political work, on building mass organization in the rural areas before launching military operations, and on integrating military struggle with political education and organization, reflected the Maoist rather than the foco approach.

8.4 The Naxalite Movement in India: Lessons and Limitations

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As noted above, the Naxalbari uprising of 1967 and the subsequent formation of the CPI(ML) were immediately relevant precedents for Sikder's organizational work. But the Naxalite experience in India also provided a set of cautionary lessons that Sikder had to engage with.

The Naxalite movement, particularly under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar, developed a theory of "annihilation of class enemies" that emphasized the targeted killing of landlords, moneylenders, and police informers as the primary method of building revolutionary consciousness among the peasantry. The logic of this theory, which Mazumdar derived from a particular reading of Mao's military writings, was that armed actions against the class enemy would demonstrate the weakness of the state and inspire the peasantry to join the revolution, while also eliminating the most oppressive individuals who maintained the local class structure.

This theory had catastrophic practical consequences. The systematic killing of individuals, many of whom were targeted on the basis of local informers' accusations of uncertain reliability, alienated sections of the peasantry and provided justification for massive state repression. The Naxalite movement in West Bengal was effectively crushed by 1971-1972 through a combination of police violence and the political mobilization of the CPI(M) against the Naxalites. The movement's urban wing, which had launched a campaign of "annihilation" in Calcutta's streets, was similarly suppressed.

Sikder engaged with the Naxalite experience with a critical but not entirely dismissive perspective. He criticized the annihilation line and the adventurism that had characterized sections of the movement. But he also recognized the Naxalite movement as the most significant attempt to build a Maoist revolutionary movement in South Asia and drew on its experience, both positive and negative, in developing his own organizational and strategic approach.

The specific criticism that Sikder directed at the Deben-Motin Trotskyite-Guevarist line, as he called it, and at various other tendencies within the East Pakistani left, often drew on the lessons of the Naxalite experience as a demonstration of the practical consequences of theoretical errors.

8.5 The Algerian Revolution and Anti-Colonial Theory

The Algerian Revolution of 1954 to 1962, in which the National Liberation Front (FLN) achieved Algerian independence from France after eight years of armed struggle, was another important reference point in the global anti-colonial movement of the 1960s. The Algerian case was particularly notable because it represented a successful example of armed national liberation struggle against a major European colonial power, achieved in conditions that seemed initially quite unfavorable to the liberation forces.

The Algerian Revolution also had a significant theoretical legacy, particularly through the work of Frantz Fanon, who served as a psychiatrist in the FLN's revolutionary movement and who wrote extensively about the psychology of colonial domination and the transformative potential of anti-colonial violence. Fanon's analysis of the role of violence in decolonization, controversial

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and disturbing as it is, raised questions that could not be avoided in any serious engagement with revolutionary theory in a colonial context.

For Sikder, the Algerian example demonstrated that colonial liberation movements could succeed even against powerful states with modern military forces, provided they maintained the political will and organizational capacity for sustained resistance. The FLN's success also demonstrated the importance of mass political organization, not merely guerrilla military operations, in sustaining a liberation struggle over many years.

CHAPTER NINE: THE EAST BENGAL WORKERS MOVEMENT IN PRACTICE: ORGANIZING, AGITATING, AND BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

9.1 Clandestine Organization and the Challenges of Underground Politics

The founding of the EBWM as a clandestine organization immediately created a set of practical challenges that would define the character of the organization and shape its subsequent development. Operating underground in the conditions of Ayub Khan's military dictatorship meant accepting severe constraints on public activity, on communications, and on the recruitment of new members.

The security imperatives of clandestine organization required strict compartmentalization of information. Members used pseudonyms rather than their real names. Information about the organization's structure, leadership, and activities was restricted to those with a "need to know." Communications were conducted through face-to-face meetings wherever possible, minimizing the paper trail that state intelligence could exploit.

These security measures were not merely paranoid precautions. The Pakistani state's intelligence apparatus was actively monitoring the left political movements, and several activists were detained or imprisoned for their political activities. The knowledge that state repression was a real possibility shaped the organizational culture of the EBWM from the beginning, creating a culture of discipline, caution, and self-sacrifice that would characterize the Sarbahara Party throughout its existence.

9.2 The Agrarian Program and the Peasant Question

The peasant question was central to Sikder's revolutionary strategy, both theoretically and practically. East Bengal's overwhelmingly agrarian social structure meant that any revolutionary movement that remained confined to the urban intelligentsia and student milieu could not hope to achieve the mass base necessary for a successful people's war. Building genuine organizational roots in the rural peasantry was an existential necessity.

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Sikder's agrarian program was designed to address the specific grievances and interests of different sections of the rural population while building toward the longer-term objective of land redistribution and socialist transformation. The immediate demands included the abolition of landlordism and the distribution of land to the tillers, the abolition of all agricultural debt owed to moneylenders and landlords, the establishment of fair prices for agricultural products, and the protection of poor peasants from the arbitrary violence and exploitation of the rural elite.

These demands were not unique to the EBWM; they were broadly shared across the left political spectrum. What distinguished the EBWM's approach was the insistence on building the organizational capacity to enforce these demands rather than merely propagating them politically. Organizing peasants into action committees, distributing confiscated landlord land directly to the landless, and protecting poor peasants from landlord reprisals through the organization's nascent military capacity were all part of the practical work of building the revolutionary base.

9.3 The Mao Tse Tung Thought Research Centre and Ideological Development

The Mao Tse Tung Thought Research Centre, which Sikder established in Dhaka in 1967 before the founding of the EBWM, was the site of the intensive theoretical work that laid the foundations for the EBWM's political line. The Centre brought together individuals who were dissatisfied with the existing communist organizations and who were committed to developing a theoretically rigorous and practically relevant analysis of East Bengal's revolutionary situation.

The work of the Centre was primarily educational and theoretical: systematic study of Marxist texts, collective discussion and debate, the development of position papers and analyses that would become the theoretical documents of the EBWM. This work was painstaking and demanding, requiring the kind of sustained intellectual effort that does not come easily in the context of political activism. But Sikder insisted on it because he was convinced that the theoretical inadequacy of the existing left organizations was the fundamental cause of their political failures.

The physical attacks on the Research Centre by Jamaat-e-Islami cadres, noted earlier, were not merely a security problem. They were a political demonstration of the deep antagonism between the emerging Maoist movement and the organized Islamist right. The Islamist movement in East Pakistan was deeply threatened by the Maoist combination of anti-colonialism, anti-feudalism, and class politics, which was mobilizing sections of the rural poor who were also the potential constituency of populist Islamist politics.

9.4 Linking Theory to Practice: The Unity of Thought and Action

One of the most characteristic features of Sikder's political approach was his insistence on the unity of theory and practice. This was not merely a methodological principle derived from Mao's "On Practice." It was a practical organizational requirement that shaped the EBWM's work in specific ways.

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The EBWM's political training program, which all new members were required to go through, combined theoretical study with practical organizational tasks. Members were expected to study the basic texts of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought, to understand the EBWM's analysis of East Bengal's contradictions, and to develop the ability to apply theoretical principles to the specific situations they encountered in their work. At the same time, they were expected to engage in concrete organizational tasks: recruiting new members, conducting political education among workers and peasants, participating in mass struggles.

This integration of theory and practice was what distinguished the EBWM, in Sikder's view, from both the purely theoretical "study groups" that proliferated in the student left and the purely practical "activist" organizations that engaged in mass work without theoretical grounding. Without theory, practice is blind; without practice, theory is empty. The unity of theory and practice was the condition for effective revolutionary action.

9.5 The Intellectual Legacy of the EBWM Thesis: International Receptions and Scholarly Debates

The theoretical documents of the EBWM, particularly the founding thesis and subsequent position papers authored by Sikder, have attracted scholarly attention and political discussion that extended well beyond East Pakistan. Within the international Maoist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, these documents were read and discussed as significant contributions to the application of Maoist theory in the South Asian context.

The reception of Sikder's theoretical work has evolved significantly over the decades. In the immediate aftermath of his death in 1975, his writings circulated primarily within the surviving Sarbahara Party organizations and their international sympathizers. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the revolutionary left entered a period of global decline following the failures of the armed movements of the 1970s and the collapse of Soviet-aligned communist parties, interest in Sikder's work diminished somewhat.

But the 2000s and 2010s saw a revival of interest in the Maoist revolutionary tradition, partly through the example of the Nepal People's War (1996 to 2006), in which the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) led a successful armed insurgency that brought the Maoists to state power, and partly through the ongoing Naxalite insurgency in India, which has maintained its guerrilla presence in the tribal belt of central India despite repeated government offensives. In this context, Sikder's theoretical work has been reassessed as a significant contribution to the South Asian Maoist tradition.

Most recently, the Bloody July uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh, which overthrew the fifteen-year government of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League through mass street protests, has generated renewed interest in Sikder as a historical figure whose critique of Awami League authoritarianism seems prescient in retrospect. The large mural of Sikder painted over the portrait of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhaka University following the uprising is a powerful symbol of this reassessment.

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CHAPTER TEN: THE PERSONAL DIMENSIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY COMMITMENT: CHARACTER, PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY INDIVIDUAL

10.1 The Making of a Revolutionary Character

Biographies of revolutionaries face a particular analytical challenge: the need to understand individual psychology and character without reducing the political and theoretical dimensions of their subject to mere expressions of psychological traits. This challenge is particularly acute in the case of Siraj Sikder, about whom primary sources are scarce and whose inner life is largely accessible only through his political writings and the accounts of those who knew him.

What can be reconstructed from the available evidence suggests a character of exceptional intellectual ability, great organizational energy, strong personal authority, and intense personal commitment to his revolutionary project. Those who knew Sikder in the student movement describe a man who was both intellectually formidable, always the most theoretically sophisticated person in any discussion, and personally engaging, with a charismatic ability to inspire commitment in those around him.

His decision to abandon a promising engineering career for clandestine revolutionary politics was not a casual or impulsive choice. He had the option of a comfortable professional life within the colonial system, the kind of life that many of his contemporaries from similar backgrounds chose. His rejection of this option in favor of the grinding, dangerous, and often frustrating work of building a revolutionary organization reflected a genuine and deeply considered moral commitment.

10.2 The Relationship Between Technical Expertise and Revolutionary Leadership

The biographical detail that Sikder was a civil engineer is not incidental to his political career. The relationship between technical expertise and revolutionary leadership is a recurring theme in the history of revolutionary movements, and Sikder's case offers a particularly interesting example of how technical training shaped political practice.

Civil engineering is a discipline that is fundamentally concerned with material conditions, with the physical world and how human intervention in it can create or destroy conditions for human welfare. Engineers think systematically about problems, analyzing complex systems in terms of their component parts and their interactions, identifying constraints and resources, and designing solutions that are both technically feasible and practically implementable.

Sikder brought these habits of thought to his political work. His theoretical documents are distinguished by their systematic organization, their explicit identification of the key variables in political situations, and their concern with practical implementation. Unlike many revolutionary

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theorists who stop at the level of general principles, Sikder consistently pushed toward the specific organizational and tactical implications of his theoretical analysis.

His interest in the physical geography of potential base areas, in the construction of fortifications and tunnels for guerrilla use, in the practical logistics of underground organization, all reflect the engineer's attention to the material conditions of what he was trying to build. The engineer's question, "How do we actually build this?", was never far from Sikder's revolutionary thinking.

10.3 The Strains of Leadership and the Internal Dynamics of the Revolutionary Organization

Leading a clandestine revolutionary organization is an extraordinarily demanding role. The combination of constant security pressures, the demands of organizational maintenance and development, the responsibility for the welfare and discipline of cadres, and the constant need to maintain theoretical and strategic clarity in the face of rapidly changing political conditions creates psychological strains that few can sustain indefinitely.

Available evidence about the internal dynamics of the EBWM and the subsequent Sarbahara Party suggests both the extraordinary quality of the organization's leadership and some of the tensions and difficulties that arose within it. Sikder maintained very high standards of ideological and organizational discipline, insisting that party members adhere strictly to the organizational rules and the political line. He was particularly severe about what he considered "petty bourgeois" tendencies within the organization: individualism, careerism, and the subordination of organizational discipline to personal relationships.

The expulsion of members for violations of organizational rules, including in some cases personal behavior that Sikder considered incompatible with revolutionary commitment, such as unauthorized marriage, created internal tensions and left a complicated legacy. The deaths of some expelled members, under circumstances that suggested involvement by Sarbahara Party operatives, remain among the most deeply troubling and contested aspects of Sikder's legacy.

These internal dynamics raise important questions about the relationship between revolutionary ideology and organizational practice, about the tendency of organizations committed to human liberation to reproduce in their internal life some of the same authoritarian patterns they claim to oppose in the broader society. These are questions that recur throughout the history of the revolutionary left, from the Bolshevik experience to the internal conflicts of various Maoist parties, and they are directly relevant to any honest assessment of Sikder's political project.

10.4 Gender and Revolution: Women in the EBWM and the Limits of a Maoist Critique

Any comprehensive assessment of Siraj Sikder's revolutionary project must address the question of gender. The EBWM and the Sarbahara Party were organizations active in a profoundly patriarchal society, and the question of whether and how they challenged the gendered dimensions of that patriarchy is important both historically and theoretically.

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Maoist theory, in the Chinese tradition, explicitly recognized women's liberation as an aspect of the democratic revolution. Mao's famous dictum that "women hold up half the sky" and the CCP's efforts during the revolutionary period to challenge feudal marriage practices, promote women's participation in political and economic life, and address domestic violence and other forms of gender-based oppression are part of the historical record, whatever the limitations of their implementation in practice.

Sikder's organizations included women members, though they appear to have been a minority, and the party's official political line included a commitment to women's liberation as part of the broader democratic revolution. But the practical reality of gender relations within the organization, as reflected in the cases of expelled members whose situations had gender dimensions, suggests that the gap between formal commitment to women's liberation and actual organizational practice was significant.

This is not a criticism unique to the Sarbahara Party. The tension between formal revolutionary commitments to gender equality and the actual reproduction of patriarchal norms within revolutionary organizations is a recurrent feature of the history of the left worldwide. But it is important to name it specifically in Sikder's case, both because honest historical assessment requires it and because the most recent feminist scholarship on South Asian revolutionary movements, produced in 2024 and 2025, has brought new analytical tools to bear on these questions.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE LATE 1960S: GLOBAL REVOLUTION AND LOCAL STRUGGLE

11.1 1968 as a World-Historical Moment

The year 1968 is remembered globally as a year of revolutionary upheaval. From the Tet Offensive in Vietnam that shattered American public confidence in the war, to the student and worker uprisings in France that brought the country to the brink of revolution, to the Prague Spring and its violent suppression by Soviet tanks, to the student movements in Mexico, Germany, Italy, and the United States, 1968 was a year when the possibility of fundamental social transformation seemed to many activists and observers to be genuinely on the historical agenda.

The founding of the EBWM on January 8, 1968, placed Sikder's organizational initiative in the midst of this global revolutionary moment. The connections between the East Pakistani situation and the global revolutionary wave were not merely symbolic. The same forces of anti-colonial resistance, student and youth radicalization, and Maoist political theory that were generating revolutionary movements around the world were at work in East Pakistan. The same theoretical questions, about the principal contradiction, the correct revolutionary strategy, and the

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relationship between national liberation and class struggle, were being debated by revolutionaries from Dhaka to Paris to Berkeley to Buenos Aires.

The global context of 1968 shaped Sikder's work in several specific ways. The international Maoist movement, with its networks of communication and mutual influence, was a real intellectual and political resource for the EBWM. The Chinese Communist Party's publications, which were available in Bengali translation and in English, provided theoretical guidance and organizational inspiration. The examples of ongoing revolutionary movements in Vietnam, Cuba, and elsewhere provided both practical lessons and political inspiration.

But Sikder also insisted, consistently and rigorously, on the primacy of the local over the global. The international Maoist movement's general principles had to be applied specifically to East Bengal's specific conditions. The principal contradiction in East Bengal was not the same as the principal contradiction in China in the 1930s or in Cuba in the 1950s. The correct revolutionary strategy for East Bengal had to be derived from a concrete analysis of East Bengal's specific class structure, geographic conditions, and historical development. This insistence on concrete analysis over mechanical application of general formulas was one of Sikder's most important methodological contributions.

11.2 The Impact of the Cultural Revolution on East Bengali Maoism

The Chinese Cultural Revolution, which was at its height from 1966 to 1969, had a complex and ambivalent impact on the international Maoist movement. On one hand, it represented a dramatic reaffirmation of the revolutionary spirit and a challenge to bureaucratic ossification. On the other hand, the specific forms that the Cultural Revolution took, particularly the Red Guards' attacks on intellectuals, teachers, and party veterans, raised disturbing questions about the relationship between revolutionary ideology and political violence.

For East Pakistani Maoists like Sikder, the Cultural Revolution was a source of inspiration but also of caution. The Cultural Revolution's insistence on continuous class struggle, on preventing the bureaucratic crystallization of revolutionary gains, and on maintaining the primacy of political commitment over technical expertise all resonated with Sikder's own political values. But the Cultural Revolution's practical implementation, with its episodes of mob violence and ideological fanaticism, was harder to simply embrace.

The later reassessment of the Cultural Revolution within the Chinese Communist Party itself, which after Mao's death in 1976 officially characterized it as a catastrophic mistake, added another dimension to the Maoist movement's need to critically engage with the Cultural Revolution rather than simply defending it. For the Sarbahara Party and its successors, the question of how to assess the Cultural Revolution became part of the broader theoretical debate about the lessons of the Chinese revolutionary experience.

11.3 The Ayub Khan Regime: State and Society in East Pakistan 1958 to 1969

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To understand the specific political environment in which the EBWM was founded and in which it conducted its initial organizing, it is necessary to understand the character and dynamics of Ayub Khan's military government, which ruled Pakistan from the coup of October 1958 to Ayub's forced resignation in March 1969.

Ayub Khan's regime represented a particular form of authoritarian developmentalism, in which the military exercised direct political power in the name of orderly economic development and the maintenance of national unity. Ayub promoted a program of "Basic Democracies," a system of local councils that was intended to provide a controlled outlet for political participation without threatening military control of the national state. He pursued economic development policies that favored the industrial bourgeoisie, particularly in West Pakistan, and that led to rapid growth in aggregate economic indicators but also to greater inequality and concentration of wealth.

For East Pakistan, the Ayub years were characterized by systematic economic discrimination, political repression of Bengali nationalist demands, and the growing conviction that the democratic aspirations of the Bengali majority could not be achieved within the framework of Pakistani unity. The 1954 United Front election, which had been nullified by the central government, demonstrated that even democratic electoral success could be denied through the mechanisms of state power. The Ayub period reinforced this lesson and generated the mass political consciousness that erupted in the 1969 uprising.

The intelligence and security apparatus that Ayub's regime maintained in East Pakistan was a direct and concrete threat to organizations like the EBWM. The ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) and Military Intelligence monitored political organizations, detained activists, and used informers to penetrate political organizations. Operating in this environment required the EBWM to develop a culture of security-consciousness and organizational discipline that would remain characteristic of the Sarbahara Party throughout its existence.

11.4 The Urban Working Class and Labor Politics in East Pakistan

While Sikder's revolutionary strategy focused primarily on the rural peasantry as the main social force of the revolution, the urban working class was not absent from his political analysis or his organizational work. Understanding the specific character of the East Pakistani industrial working class in the 1960s is important for understanding both the opportunities and the limitations that this class presented for revolutionary organizing.

The industrial working class in East Pakistan in the late 1960s was concentrated primarily in the jute mills of Narayanganj, the textile mills of Dhaka, and the port and dock facilities of Chittagong. These workers had a history of labor organizing going back to the colonial period, with trade unions affiliated with various political tendencies and a tradition of strikes and collective action that had survived despite the legal restrictions on trade union activity under Ayub Khan.

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The jute mill workers were a particularly significant sector. Jute was East Pakistan's major industrial employer and its primary source of foreign exchange. The jute mill workers had developed a significant degree of class consciousness and union organization, and the jute mills were a site of recurring labor conflict. The connection between jute production and the broader political economy of colonial extraction, in which the raw material was grown in East Bengal but processed and traded primarily for the benefit of West Pakistani and international capital, made the jute workers a potential vanguard of the broader anti-colonial struggle.

For the EBWM, which presented itself as a workers' movement despite its primarily intellectual and student composition, building genuine organizational connections with the industrial working class was both a political priority and a practical challenge. The cultural and social distance between educated middle-class political activists and industrial workers was significant, and bridging it required sustained effort and genuine respect for the workers' own organizations, traditions, and leadership.

CHAPTER TWELVE: LEGAL ANALYSIS AND JURISPRUDENTIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE COLONIAL THESIS

12.1 The Legal Framework of Pakistani Federalism and Its Application to East-West Relations

The jurisprudential analysis of Sikder's colonial thesis requires a detailed examination of the legal framework of Pakistani federalism and how it structured the relationship between East and West Pakistan. This examination reveals both the formal legal arguments that the Pakistani government and its defenders might use to refute the colonial thesis and the substantive legal realities that gave it force.

The 1956 Constitution of Pakistan, the first permanent constitution adopted after the country's founding, created a federal structure with a central government and two provincial governments (East Pakistan and West Pakistan, with West Pakistan having been unified into a "One Unit" in 1955). The constitution gave the provincial governments authority over specified subjects, including agriculture, education, and local government, while reserving major economic and security powers to the center. It included provisions for the protection of fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, assembly, and religion.

On its face, this constitutional structure provided formal equality between the two wings. Both provinces had the same constitutional status, both were represented in the national legislature, and both were theoretically protected by the same fundamental rights provisions. The Pakistani government's defense of its rule in East Pakistan drew on this formal constitutional equality: East Pakistan was not a colony but a province of Pakistan with the same constitutional rights as West Pakistan.

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But the substantive reality diverged sharply from the formal constitutional framework. The "One Unit" policy, which merged the four provinces of West Pakistan into a single administrative unit, was specifically designed to create parity of political representation between East and West, thereby preventing the Bengali majority from exercising its numerical dominance in the national legislature. The central government's repeated use of its emergency powers to dismiss elected provincial governments in East Pakistan when they produced results inconvenient to the center demonstrated that formal constitutional equality was subordinate to the practical dominance of the West Pakistani political establishment.

The specific economic mechanisms through which West Pakistani interests extracted surplus from East Pakistan were not prohibited by the constitutional framework; indeed, the central government's control over foreign exchange allocation, import licensing, and development planning gave it the legal authority to implement the discriminatory economic policies that gave substance to the colonial thesis.

12.2 International Law and the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination

The principle of self-determination in international law, which was cited above as one of the frameworks for evaluating the legitimacy of Sikder's revolutionary project, requires more detailed analysis, particularly in the context of the legal debates that surrounded the Bangladesh independence struggle.

Self-determination in international law has a complex and contested history. The principle was first formally articulated in the context of the post-World War I peace settlements, where President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points included the right of peoples to self-determination. But Wilson's application of the principle was selective and Eurocentric: it applied to the peoples of the defeated empires (the Ottoman, Habsburg, and German empires) but not to the colonial peoples of the European empires.

After World War II, the United Nations Charter's invocation of self-determination was similarly ambiguous. The principle was used primarily to justify the decolonization of formal European overseas colonies rather than to recognize the rights of peoples within formally independent states. The UN Decolonization Committee's work was focused on the classic cases of European overseas colonialism, not on situations where one region of a formal nation-state claimed the right to self-determination against the central government.

Pakistan's specific case was therefore legally controversial. The Pakistani government argued that East Pakistan's self-determination had already been exercised in 1947, when the Bengali Muslims voted to join Pakistan rather than India in the partition referendum. The subsequent claims for Bengali autonomy or independence were, in this view, not a matter of self-determination but of internal political conflict within a sovereign state.

The counter-argument, which Sikder's colonial thesis implied though it was more fully developed in the legal debates surrounding the 1971 independence struggle, was that self-

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determination was not a one-time event but an ongoing right. If the conditions under which East Pakistan had joined the Pakistani state were fundamentally different from the conditions that had been promised or implied, if the Pakistani state was systematically violating the political and economic rights of the Bengali majority, and if the Pakistani military was using mass violence against the Bengali population, then the right to self-determination remained operative and could justify independence.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 2625 (1970), the "Friendly Relations Declaration," navigated this tension by affirming the right of peoples to self-determination while also affirming the territorial integrity of existing states. It stated that the right to self-determination applied to peoples under "colonial and alien domination," which could be interpreted to include East Pakistan's situation, but it also specified that nothing in the declaration should be construed as authorizing the dismemberment of states that "conduct themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples."

The Pakistani military's conduct in East Pakistan from March 1971 onwards, with its systematic mass atrocities, clearly violated the condition of conducting itself "in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination." This made the case for international legal recognition of Bangladesh's independence, which was recognized by India, the Soviet Union, and eventually most of the world community, substantially stronger.

12.3 The Question of Legitimate Authority and the Right to Resist

Central to any jurisprudential assessment of Sikder's revolutionary project is the question of legitimate authority: under what conditions does a state exercise legitimate authority over its subjects, and under what conditions does the absence or abuse of legitimate authority create a right of resistance?

The natural law tradition, from Aquinas through Locke and Rousseau, grounds legitimate authority in some form of consent or social contract. A government that exercises power without the consent of the governed, or that systematically violates the basic rights that are the purpose of political authority, forfeits its claim to legitimate obedience. The right of resistance, in this tradition, is not unlimited and does not extend to every case of government injustice. But it does apply when the violation of basic rights is systematic and fundamental, when peaceful remedies have been exhausted or denied, and when the resistance is proportionate to the injustice being resisted.

Applied to the East Pakistan situation, this analysis supports the conclusion that the Pakistani state's exercise of authority over East Bengal lacked legitimate authority in the substantive sense. The systematic denial of Bengali political self-determination, the discriminatory economic policies that extracted surplus from the east for the benefit of the west, and the violent suppression of peaceful political demands all constituted fundamental violations of the basic rights that ground legitimate political authority. The exhaustion of peaceful remedies was demonstrated by the long history of political mobilization from the Language Movement

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onwards that had failed to achieve basic political equality. And the scale of the injustice was clearly sufficient to justify resistance.

The more difficult question is whether the specific forms of resistance that Sikder advocated and led, in particular the armed struggle directed not only against state forces but also against individuals identified as "class enemies," were justified by this analysis. The just war tradition's criteria of proportionality and discrimination between combatants and non-combatants are relevant here, and honest assessment requires acknowledging that some of the Sarbahara Party's actions, particularly those involving the killing of individuals accused of being informers or class enemies without transparent legal process, are difficult to justify by these criteria.

This does not mean that the colonial analysis and the general principle of resistance were wrong. It means that even within a framework that accepts the justice of the cause of East Bengali liberation, the specific methods of resistance need to be evaluated separately and critically. The acknowledgment of the limits and failures of revolutionary practice is not a betrayal of the revolutionary cause but an expression of the moral seriousness that the cause demands.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ASSESSMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE: SIRAJ SIKDER IN RETROSPECT

13.1 The Theoretical Legacy: What Remains Valid

Evaluating Siraj Sikder's theoretical legacy requires separating those aspects of his analysis that have been confirmed by historical experience and remain analytically valuable from those that reflected the limitations of their time or the specific errors of their author.

The colonial thesis, as an analytical framework for understanding East Pakistan's political economy, has been substantially confirmed by subsequent historical research and by the events of 1971 themselves. The systematic economic extraction from East to West, the political and military dominance of a West Pakistani ruling class, and the violent suppression of Bengali political aspirations that characterized the Pakistani state's rule in East Bengal are now matters of historical consensus. Sikder's insistence on this analysis against the objections of communist organizations that subordinated the national question to a class analysis divorced from the colonial framework appears, in retrospect, to have been theoretically correct.

The identification of the principal contradiction as the national contradiction, and the consequent emphasis on national liberation as the immediate revolutionary task, was also confirmed by the events of 1971, in which the Bengali national liberation struggle achieved the formal objective of independence even if the subsequent social revolution that Sikder sought did not follow. The mass mobilization of 1971, which united Bengalis across class lines in resistance to the Pakistani military's genocidal assault, demonstrated the reality of the national contradiction as the organizing center of Bengali political consciousness.

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The critique of the Awami League as a bourgeois nationalist organization that would betray the social revolutionary aspirations of the working class and peasantry after achieving formal independence was also substantially confirmed by the Mujib government's record from 1972 to 1975. The Awami League government's economic policies, which favored the new Bengali bourgeoisie, its suppression of political opposition, and its dismantling of constitutional government through the establishment of BAKSAL one-party rule in early 1975, all confirmed Sikder's analysis of the class character and political trajectory of the nationalist movement.

13.2 The Practical Legacy: Organizational Experience and Revolutionary Strategy

The practical legacy of the EBWM and the Sarbahara Party is more ambiguous. On one hand, they demonstrated that it was possible to build a disciplined, theoretically coherent revolutionary organization in East Bengal's difficult conditions and to maintain it in the face of sustained state repression. The organizational experience of the EBWM and the Sarbahara Party, including its techniques of clandestine organization, mass mobilization in the rural areas, and the integration of political and military work, provide a body of practical revolutionary experience that has informed subsequent left political organizing in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the Sarbahara Party's failure to build a mass base sufficient to challenge state power, and the internal conflicts and organizational failures that accompanied its activities, demonstrate the limits of the approach it chose. The revolutionary strategy of protracted people's war, while theoretically appropriate to the conditions, could not be implemented at the scale required without a more thoroughgoing mass base than the Sarbahara Party was able to build.

13.3 The 50th Anniversary and the Revival of Interest in 2025

The fiftieth anniversary of Siraj Sikder's death in January 2025 generated significant public attention and political debate in Bangladesh, coinciding with the period of political transition following the Bloody July uprising of 2024. The uprising, in which mass street protests led by students overthrew the fifteen-year Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina, created a political climate in which the critique of Awami League authoritarianism that Sikder had articulated fifty years earlier seemed newly relevant.

The mural of Siraj Sikder painted over the image of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhaka University in the aftermath of the uprising was a powerful symbolic act, expressing the sentiment of a new generation of activists who saw in Sikder's resistance to Mujib's authoritarian government a precedent for their own resistance to Hasina's government. This symbolic act provoked controversy and debate, with some arguing that the comparison was historically inappropriate and others insisting on the continuity of Awami League authoritarianism from father to daughter.

The academic and political debates that accompanied the fiftieth anniversary commemorations reflect the ongoing relevance of Sikder's legacy for contemporary Bangladesh. Questions about the relationship between national liberation and social justice, about the role of the left in a post-

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authoritarian political settlement, about the lessons of revolutionary history for contemporary politics, are all live questions in Bangladesh in 2025 and 2026. Sikder's work provides one set of resources for engaging with these questions, even if his specific strategies and organizational forms are not directly replicable.

13.4 Recent Scholarly Developments: 2024 to 2026

The period from 2024 to 2026 has seen significant new scholarly work on Siraj Sikder and the broader tradition of South Asian Maoism. This work draws on newly available archival sources, including documents from the Sarbahara Party's own publications that have been digitized and made available through platforms like Marxists.org and Sarbaharapath.com, and on the methodological advances of postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and new labor history that have transformed the field of South Asian political history.

One important trend in recent scholarship is the attempt to understand Sikder's legacy not simply as a matter of party history or revolutionary biography but as a contribution to the history of political thought in South Asia. Scholars working in this vein have examined Sikder's theoretical writings not merely as political documents but as philosophical texts that engage with fundamental questions about colonial domination, class structure, legitimate authority, and the ethics of resistance. This approach has generated new readings of Sikder's work that emphasize its originality and its engagement with global intellectual currents in ways that earlier scholarship had sometimes missed.

Another important trend is the attempt to understand the social history of the Sarbahara Party's constituencies, to reconstruct the experiences of the workers, peasants, and poor villagers who supported, joined, or were affected by the party's activities. This approach, which draws on the methodology of subaltern studies, shifts the focus from the party leadership and its theoretical documents to the experiences and agency of the social groups that the party claimed to represent.

The feminist scholarship mentioned earlier is part of a broader effort to understand the gendered dimensions of revolutionary politics in Bangladesh, examining both the participation of women in the EBWM and Sarbahara Party and the limitations of the movement's engagement with women's liberation as a dimension of its revolutionary program.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE: THE FORMATION OF A REVOLUTIONARY AND THE FOUNDING OF A MOVEMENT

The period covered in this first part of the textbook, from the historical background of colonial Bengal through to the founding of the East Bengal Workers Movement in January 1968, is the most foundational in understanding Siraj Sikder and his political project. In these years, the crucial intellectual and organizational formation took place that would shape everything that followed.

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What emerges from this account is a picture of extraordinary complexity and seriousness. Siraj Sikder was not a simple figure. He was not a romantic hero who took up arms against oppression out of instinct or passion. He was a systematic thinker who spent years developing a theoretically rigorous analysis of East Bengal's specific political conditions, who studied the global history of revolutionary movements and tried to derive specific lessons applicable to his own situation, who built organizational structures with deliberate attention to both theoretical soundness and practical effectiveness.

The colonial thesis, the identification of the principal contradiction as the national contradiction between Pakistani colonialism and the people of East Bengal, was not a rhetorical device but a substantive analytical claim that has been substantially confirmed by history. The theory of new democratic revolution, the strategy of protracted people's war, and the organizational model of the Leninist vanguard party were all carefully chosen tools, adapted from global revolutionary theory and applied with attention to East Bengal's specific conditions.

At the same time, Sikder's project embodied tensions and contradictions that honest assessment cannot ignore. The tension between the liberatory aspiration of his politics and the authoritarian tendencies of the organizational forms he chose. The tension between his genuine commitment to the interests of the sarbahara, the most exploited and oppressed sections of Bengali society, and the petty bourgeois class composition of the organization he led. The tension between his theoretical sophistication and the practical limitations of what he could actually achieve in the specific historical conditions of East Pakistan.

These tensions did not negate the significance or the seriousness of his project. They are, rather, the characteristic tensions of any genuine attempt to change the world in conditions that are not of one's choosing. The revolutionary who confronts these tensions honestly, who theorizes them clearly and tries to navigate them practically, is engaged in the kind of serious political work that deserves serious scholarly attention.

Part Two of this textbook will take up the story with the liberation war of 1971, the founding of the Sarbahara Party, the military struggle against both the Pakistani army and the forces of the Awami League, and the complex political navigation of the independence period. It will examine in detail the military theory and practice of the Sarbahara Party, the specific social dynamics of the southern districts where the party built its main base, and the political confrontation with the post-independence Mujib government that would culminate in Sikder's capture and death in January 1975.

SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYTICAL NOTES TO PART ONE

Note A: On the Concept of Social Formation in Marxist Theory

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The concept of "social formation," which is used throughout this text and which was important to Sikder's own analysis, deserves clarification for readers less familiar with Marxist theoretical vocabulary. The concept was developed in the Althusserian tradition of structural Marxism, drawing on Louis Althusser's influential "Reading Capital" (1965) and "For Marx" (1965), to designate the specific historical configuration of modes of production, social relations, and institutional forms that characterize a given society at a particular historical moment.

A social formation is not simply a mode of production. It may contain elements of multiple modes of production in combination: for example, a social formation like East Pakistan's in the 1960s contained elements of a capitalist mode of production (particularly in the jute mills and the commercial sector), a feudal or semi-feudal mode (in the agrarian relations of the countryside), and a colonial mode in which a superordinate state extracted surplus from the entire formation.

The significance of the concept of social formation for political analysis is that it prevents the mechanical application of theoretical categories derived from one specific mode of production to social formations where that mode is not fully dominant. Mao Zedong's concept of the "semi-colonial and semi-feudal social formation," which he developed to characterize China's specific historical conditions, is an example of this kind of careful attention to the specific configuration of modes of production in a particular historical context. Sikder's adaptation of this framework to East Bengal's specific conditions was an exercise in the same kind of concrete theoretical analysis.

Note B: On the Principle of Contradiction in Dialectical Logic

The principle of contradiction that underlies Mao Zedong's philosophical essays and that is central to Sikder's theoretical methodology derives from Hegel's dialectical logic, as refracted through Marx and Engels's materialist dialectic and Lenin's philosophical notes on Hegel's Logic.

For Hegel, contradiction is not merely a logical error to be avoided but the basic principle of reality. Everything that exists is characterized by internal contradictions, by the presence within it of opposing tendencies or forces whose conflict drives the development of the thing. The resolution of one contradiction generates a new synthesis that itself contains new contradictions. This is the "dialectical" movement of history and of thought.

Marx and Engels adopted this dialectical logic from Hegel but "stood it on its head," as Marx famously put it, by grounding it in material reality rather than in the development of Spirit or Idea. The contradictions that drive historical development are not primarily contradictions of thought but contradictions of social existence, particularly the contradictions of class society between exploiting and exploited classes.

Lenin's reading of Hegel's Logic, recorded in his "Philosophical Notebooks" (1915-1916), emphasized the importance of the unity of opposites as the core of dialectical analysis. For

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Lenin, the most fundamental aspect of dialectics was the recognition that everything contains its own negation, that the contradictions within a thing are what drive its development.

Mao's philosophical essays "On Practice" and "On Contradiction" applied these ideas in a specifically pedagogical context, translating the abstractions of dialectical logic into accessible examples and principles for the guidance of revolutionary practice. The practical upshot was the method of "concrete analysis of concrete conditions," the insistence that abstract theoretical principles must always be applied to the specific particulars of the situation at hand, and that the key to correct revolutionary practice is the correct identification of the principal contradiction in any given situation.

For Sikder, applying this method meant carefully analyzing the specific contradictions of East Bengal's social formation and determining which was principal, that is, which was the one whose resolution would determine the trajectory of social development and the resolution of other contradictions. His conclusion that the national contradiction between Pakistani colonialism and the people of East Bengal was principal was the result of this method, and it was a conclusion he defended with theoretical rigor against alternative analyses.

Note C: On Theories of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Contemporary Scholarship

The scholarly study of anti-colonial resistance has undergone significant development in the period from 2020 to 2026, incorporating new theoretical frameworks from postcolonial studies, decolonial thought, and the global turn in intellectual history. These developments provide new contexts for understanding Sikder's intellectual contributions.

The "decolonial turn" in scholarship, associated with thinkers like Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, and María Lugones, has expanded the analysis of coloniality beyond the formal political structures of colonial rule to examine what Quijano calls the "coloniality of power," the persistence of colonial patterns of authority, knowledge, and subjectivity in the post-colonial world. This framework is relevant to Sikder's analysis of the post-independence Awami League government, which he argued reproduced the structural features of colonial exploitation even after formal independence from Pakistan.

The "connected histories" approach in South Asian historiography, developed by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and others, emphasizes the importance of understanding local political and intellectual developments in their global connections rather than as self-contained national or regional phenomena. This approach supports the kind of analysis pursued in this textbook, which situates Sikder's theoretical and organizational work within its global intellectual context in the Maoist movement of the 1960s while also insisting on the specific local conditions that shaped his adaptation of that global framework.

Recent work in the "global 1960s" scholarship, examining the interconnected wave of radical politics that characterized the decade from multiple geographic perspectives, provides additional

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context for understanding the EBWM's founding and the specific ways in which Sikder engaged with global revolutionary theory in developing his analysis of East Bengal's situation.

The specific field of Bangladesh studies has also developed significantly in recent years, with new archival work and new conceptual frameworks that have deepened understanding of the political history of the liberation movement and its aftermath. The work of scholars like Willem van Schendel, Nayanika Mookherjee, and Bina D'Costa, among others, has contributed to a richer understanding of the social and political history of Bengal in the twentieth century that provides essential context for understanding Sikder's world.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF KEY EVENTS IN PART ONE

1757: Battle of Plassey; beginning of British colonial rule in Bengal

1793: Permanent Settlement; creation of the zamindar landlord class

1905: First Partition of Bengal; Swadeshi movement

1911: Reunification of Bengal

1930s to 1940s: Rise of the Bengal communist movement; Pakistan movement

1947: Partition of British India; creation of Pakistan; East Bengal becomes East Pakistan

1952: Language Movement; police killings of February 21

1954: United Front election victory in East Pakistan; dismissed by central government

1956: First Constitution of Pakistan; formalization of "One Unit"

1958: Ayub Khan military coup; political parties banned

1959: Siraj Sikder passes matriculation from Barisal Zilla School

1961: Sikder admitted to Brojomohun College, Barisal

1963: Sikder admitted to EPUET (now BUET) for civil engineering

1965: Sino-Soviet split formalized in East Pakistan Student Union; Sikder aligns with pro-China faction

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1967: Sikder graduates from BUET; establishes Mao Tse Tung Thought Research Centre; attempts to establish guerrilla base in Chittagong Hill Tracts

1967: Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal, India; founding of the Maoist movement in India

January 8, 1968: Founding of the Purba Bangla Sramik Andolon (East Bengal Workers Movement)

December 1968: First major theoretical document of the EBWM

1969: Mass uprising in East Pakistan; fall of Ayub Khan; Yahya Khan assumes power

December 1970: Pakistani general election; Awami League wins massive majority

March 25-26, 1971: Operation Searchlight; Pakistani military launches genocidal assault on East Pakistan

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Awami League: The major Bengali nationalist political party founded in 1949, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Won the 1970 general election by a massive majority. Led the independence struggle of 1971 and governed Bangladesh from 1972 to 1975 and again from 1996 to 2001 and 2009 to 2024.

Bhadralok: Literally "respectable people" in Bengali. The educated middle class of Bengal, the primary social base of Bengali nationalism and cultural production.

Colonial thesis: Siraj Sikder's analysis that East Bengal's relationship to the Pakistani state was colonial in its substance, characterized by systematic economic extraction, political domination, and cultural subordination analogous to the relationship between a colonial power and its colony.

Comprador bourgeoisie: In Maoist political economy, the section of the local bourgeoisie that serves as an intermediary for foreign or colonial capital, facilitating its extraction of surplus from the local economy, as opposed to the "national bourgeoisie" that engages in independent productive activity.

Democratic centralism: The organizational principle of Leninist parties, under which decisions are made through democratic discussion within the party but are then binding on all members and implemented as centrally directed.

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East Bengal Workers Movement (EBWM): The Purba Bangla Sramik Andolon, founded by Siraj Sikder on January 8, 1968, as a clandestine organization to develop and propagate Maoist political theory in East Pakistan and to form the nucleus of a revolutionary communist party.

Foco theory: The theory of revolutionary strategy derived from Che Guevara's Cuban experience and theorized by Regis Debray, which argued that a small armed vanguard (foco) could ignite a revolutionary conflagration through its military actions without requiring prior mass political organization.

Hegemony: Antonio Gramsci's concept of the way in which ruling class dominance is maintained not only through direct coercion but through the construction and maintenance of consent, through the successful presentation of particular class interests as universal.

Jute: The fiber crop grown almost exclusively in the Bengal delta and used for sacking, rope, and carpet backing. East Pakistan's primary export commodity and source of foreign exchange in the early decades of Pakistan's existence.

Language Movement (Bhasha Andolan): The movement in 1952 against the Pakistani government's attempt to make Urdu the sole national language, culminating in the police killings of February 21, 1952.

Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought: The theoretical framework adopted by the EBWM and the Sarbahara Party, combining the foundational texts of Marxism and Leninism with Mao Zedong's theoretical contributions, particularly the theory of new democracy, protracted people's war, and the mass line.

Naxalite movement: The Maoist revolutionary movement in India that emerged from the Naxalbari uprising of 1967, characterized by armed agrarian struggle, the annihilation of class enemies, and the strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside.

New democratic revolution: Mao Zedong's theory of the transitional form of revolution appropriate to semi-colonial and semi-feudal societies, in which a broad revolutionary alliance led by the proletariat overthrows imperialism, feudalism, and comprador capitalism before proceeding to socialist construction.

One Unit: The administrative policy of 1955 that merged the four provinces of West Pakistan into a single administrative unit, designed to create parity of political representation between East and West and to prevent the Bengali majority from exercising its numerical dominance.

Permanent Settlement (1793): The colonial legal structure created by Governor-General Cornwallis that established a class of landlords (zamindars) with permanently fixed revenue obligations in exchange for absolute property rights in the land.

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Principal contradiction: In Maoist dialectical analysis, the contradiction that at a given historical stage plays the most decisive role in determining the development of a social formation and the resolution of other contradictions.

Protracted people's war: Mao Zedong's theory of revolutionary military strategy, emphasizing the gradual accumulation of strength through guerrilla warfare, the establishment of rural base areas, and the encirclement of cities from the countryside.

Revisionism: In Marxist political vocabulary, the systematic modification of revolutionary theory in directions that reduce or eliminate its revolutionary implications, accommodating the existing social order rather than challenging it.

Sarbahara: The Bengali term for proletarian or those who have nothing. Used in the name of the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party, the Proletarian Party of East Bengal, founded by Sikder in June 1971.

Self-determination: The principle, recognized in international law, that peoples have the right to determine their own political status and form of government. Applied to the claim of East Bengal to independence from Pakistan.

Sino-Soviet split: The public rupture between the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that became fully evident in 1960, dividing the international communist movement between pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions.

Social formation: In Marxist theory, the specific historical configuration of modes of production, social relations, and institutional forms that characterizes a given society at a particular historical moment.

United front: In Marxist political theory, a political alliance that brings together multiple classes and organizations against a common enemy, under the leadership of the proletariat and its communist party.

Vanguard party: In Leninist organizational theory, a party of professional revolutionaries that serves as the conscious leadership of the working class, embodying the most advanced political consciousness and providing strategic direction to the revolutionary movement.

Zamindar: The landlord class created by the British Permanent Settlement of 1793, whose property rights in the land were permanently fixed in exchange for a fixed annual revenue payment to the colonial state.

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Recent Scholarship (2024 to 2026)

Multiple articles and essays published in connection with the 50th anniversary of Siraj Sikder's death in January 2025, available through academic journals including the Journal of South Asian Studies, Modern Asian Studies, and Postcolonial Studies.

Scholarly assessments produced in the aftermath of the Bloody July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, examining the relevance of the Sarbahara Party's legacy for contemporary Bangladeshi politics, available through various online academic and political platforms.

End of Part One

Part Two: "The Liberation War, the Founding of the Sarbahara Party, and the First Years of Revolutionary Struggle (1971 to 1973)" will follow.

A Note on Sources and Methodology

This textbook has been written using a combination of primary sources, secondary historical scholarship, and theoretical works. Primary sources for Siraj Sikder's political writings are available at the Marxists.org archive and at the Sarbaharapath.com platform maintained by the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Bangladesh. Secondary historical scholarship on East Pakistan and the Bangladesh independence movement is extensive, with major contributions from Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, British, and American historians. Theoretical sources are drawn from the major texts of the Marxist, Maoist, postcolonial, and jurisprudential traditions.

Where factual claims are disputed or uncertain, the textbook has noted the uncertainty and presented the most reliable evidence available. The biographical record for Siraj Sikder is not as complete as one would wish, given both the clandestine nature of much of his activity and the political circumstances surrounding his death and the subsequent history of Bangladesh. The textbook has sought to be honest about these limitations while providing the most comprehensive and analytically rigorous account possible given available sources.

The political and historical assessments offered throughout the text reflect the author's scholarly judgment rather than advocacy for any particular political position. The goal is to provide

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students with the analytical tools to understand Siraj Sikder's life and thought in their full historical and theoretical complexity, not to promote or condemn his political project.

PART TWO: THE LIBERATION WAR, THE FOUNDING OF THE SARBAHARA PARTY, AND THE FIRST YEARS OF REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE (1971 TO 1973)

Preface to Part Two

Part One of this textbook established the deep historical, structural, and theoretical foundations upon which Siraj Sikder built his political life. It traced the arc of Bengali civilization under colonial rule, the catastrophic consequences of Partition, the language movement, the systematic economic subordination of East Pakistan, the global fracture between Soviet and Chinese communism, and Sikder's own formation as a student, engineer, and clandestine political organizer. It ended with the founding of the East Bengal Workers Movement on January 8, 1968, a moment that represented the crystallization of years of theoretical study, organizational preparation, and political commitment into a structured revolutionary initiative.

Part Two picks up that story at the moment when the contradictions that Sikder had analyzed so carefully began to explode into open historical crisis. The years 1969 to 1973 were perhaps the most compressed and consequential years in the modern history of Bangladesh. Within this period of approximately four years, East Bengal experienced a mass uprising that toppled a military dictatorship, a genocidal military assault by the Pakistani state, a liberation war that resulted in the creation of an independent Bangladesh, and then, almost immediately, a new set of political conflicts as the revolutionary left confronted the question of whether national independence under the Awami League represented genuine liberation or merely a transfer of colonial power from West Pakistani to Bengali hands.

For Siraj Sikder and the organization he led, first as the East Bengal Workers Movement and from June 1971 as the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party (Proletarian Party of East Bengal, hereafter PBSP or Sarbahara Party), this period was one of extraordinary challenge, theoretical creativity, organizational innovation, and also of considerable internal contradiction and external violence. Sikder had to navigate the complex politics of the liberation war while maintaining the theoretical integrity and organizational independence of his movement. He had to make practical decisions about armed struggle under conditions of acute crisis. He had to theorize the transition from anti-colonial struggle against Pakistan to what he would eventually call the struggle against the comprador government that emerged after independence. And he had to build a functioning revolutionary party under conditions of first Pakistani and then Bangladeshi state repression.

This Part examines all of these dimensions of the story in depth. It draws on Sikder's own theoretical writings, on the historical scholarship of the liberation war and its aftermath, on

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comparative revolutionary theory, and on the jurisprudential and philosophical frameworks that illuminate the deeper questions raised by Sikder's project. It also situates the events of 1969 to 1973 in relation to developments in the broader field of revolutionary theory and postcolonial studies that have enriched scholarly understanding in 2024, 2025, and 2026, including work produced in the aftermath of Bangladesh's July 2024 uprising and the fifty-year commemorations of Sikder's death in January 2025.

The interpretive stakes of this period are very high. Depending on how one reads the politics of 1971 to 1973, Sikder appears either as a brilliant and principled revolutionary who correctly identified the class character of the independence movement and refused to be coopted by bourgeois nationalism, or as a theoretically rigid ideologue whose organizational violence undermined the legitimacy of his cause and whose refusal to engage with the actually existing political conditions of newly independent Bangladesh produced strategic and moral failures that his movement never recovered from. Both of these readings contain elements of truth, and this textbook will not pretend that the historical judgment is simple. What it will do is provide the analytical tools, the historical context, and the theoretical frameworks that allow the reader to engage with these questions seriously, honestly, and with the depth that the subject demands.

CHAPTER SIX: THE MASS UPRISING OF 1969, THE FALL OF AYUB KHAN, AND THE GATHERING STORM

6.1 The Political Context of 1968 to 1969: Structural Crisis in Pakistan

When Siraj Sikder founded the East Bengal Workers Movement in January 1968, he was not founding an organization in a political vacuum. He was founding it at precisely the moment when the structural contradictions of the Pakistani political order were reaching a breaking point. Understanding the specific political dynamics of 1968 and 1969 is essential for understanding why the EBWM's theoretical framework resonated so powerfully with a generation of young political activists, and why the events of those years created both extraordinary opportunities and serious dangers for the nascent revolutionary movement.

General Ayub Khan had governed Pakistan since his military coup in October 1958. His decade in power had been characterized by what he called "Basic Democracy," a system of local governance that was designed to create a loyal rural elite while preventing the kind of mass political mobilization that had characterized the early years of Pakistani independence. Ayub had implemented certain economic development policies, particularly the Green Revolution agricultural modernization programs of the 1960s, that produced measurable growth in gross domestic product. But this growth was highly uneven in its distribution, concentrated in the urban industrial class and in the rural areas of West Pakistan, while the agricultural laborers and poor peasants of East Pakistan experienced little improvement in their material conditions.

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By 1968, Ayub Khan's political project was visibly failing. Economic growth had stalled. The costs of the 1965 war with India over Kashmir had been severe, and the Tashkent Agreement under which Ayub had accepted Soviet mediation to end the conflict was widely perceived as a humiliation. In East Pakistan, the Agartala Conspiracy Case, in which Ayub's government accused Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and a group of Bengali military officers of conspiring with India to separate East Pakistan, had the paradoxical effect of transforming Mujib from a popular politician into a national hero. The more brutally the government persecuted Mujib, the more his popular support grew.

In this context, the theoretical framework that the EBWM was developing had significant resonance. Sikder's colonial thesis, his argument that East Bengal was a colony of West Pakistan and that the fundamental contradiction was between the interests of the Bengali people and the power of the Pakistani bureaucratic bourgeoisie and its feudal allies, was not an abstract theoretical proposition. It corresponded to the lived experience of millions of Bengali people who saw themselves as systematically disadvantaged within the Pakistani state. The language of colonialism, exploitation, and national liberation that the EBWM deployed was already present in Bengali political culture from the language movement and before. Sikder was giving it a more systematic and theoretically sophisticated form.

The global context was also significant. 1968 was, of course, the year of global revolutionary ferment, the year of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, the May uprising in France, student revolts in Mexico, Germany, Italy, the United States, and Japan, and the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. The sense that revolutionary change was not merely desirable but imminent was palpable among radical students and intellectuals across the world. In India, the Naxalbari uprising of 1967 had shown that armed agrarian revolution was not merely a theoretical possibility but a practical reality in the South Asian context. And in China, the Cultural Revolution was at its height, generating a version of Maoist politics that was simultaneously inspiring and disorienting for revolutionary movements throughout Asia.

6.2 The Uprising of 1969: Gono Obbhuthan and Its Revolutionary Significance

The mass uprising that overthrew Ayub Khan in March 1969, known in Bengali as the Gono Obbhuthan (literally "mass uprising"), was one of the most significant political events in the history of Bangladesh. Understanding it carefully is essential both for historical accuracy and for understanding the political conditions in which the EBWM operated and the theoretical questions that the uprising posed for revolutionary analysis.

The uprising began in late 1968 as a series of student demonstrations, initially focused on specific grievances about educational policy and the conditions of student life, but rapidly expanding into a broader political movement demanding the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the withdrawal of the Agartala Conspiracy Case, the restoration of democratic rights, and the implementation of the Awami League's Six-Point Programme for East Pakistani autonomy. The student movement was led by the Chatra Sangram Parishad, a coordinating body of student

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unions, including the pro-Peking East Pakistan Student Union to which Sikder's circle was connected.

What transformed student demonstrations into a mass uprising was the killing of Asaduzzaman, a student leader, by police on January 20, 1969. Asad's death, and the subsequent killing of other protesters, ignited a massive popular reaction that swept through Dhaka and then spread across East Pakistan. Workers, peasants, petty traders, and ordinary urban residents joined the student movement in a wave of protests, strikes, and direct action that paralyzed the province. The violence of state repression did not suppress the movement; it intensified it. Sergeant Zahur, a prominent leader from the urban working class, was killed by police, adding a martyr from the working class to the student martyrs and deepening the cross-class character of the movement.

The political and philosophical significance of the 1969 uprising for the EBWM and for Sikder's theoretical framework requires careful analysis. From one perspective, the uprising appeared to vindicate the general Marxist proposition that mass political consciousness can be rapidly transformed by specific historical events, and that the contradictions of the social order can suddenly become visible and mobilizing for people who had previously accepted the status quo with apparent passivity. The speed and intensity of the popular response to Asad's killing and the subsequent killings showed that the potential for mass political action existed beneath the surface of everyday life in East Pakistan.

From another perspective, however, the uprising posed a serious challenge to the EBWM's specific theoretical framework. The mass movement of 1969 was not organized or led by the EBWM. It was primarily organized through the student unions and the political networks of the Awami League. The demands of the movement were not revolutionary in the EBWM's sense. They were demands for democratic rights, for Bengali autonomy within Pakistan, for the release of political prisoners, and for the accountability of the Pakistani government. These were, from Sikder's perspective, demands that could be satisfied within the framework of a reformed Pakistani state without challenging the class structure that produced exploitation and oppression. The fact that the mass movement was mobilized around these demands rather than around revolutionary class demands was, from the EBWM's theoretical perspective, a sign of the limitations of the Awami League's political hegemony over the popular movement.

This tension between the revolutionary potential of mass movements and the specific class leadership and demands of actually existing popular movements is one of the fundamental problems of Marxist revolutionary strategy. It is the problem that Antonio Gramsci analyzed in his concept of hegemony, the question of why the working class and the oppressed, despite their objective interests in revolutionary change, typically follow the political leadership of classes that do not represent their fundamental interests. It is the problem that Lenin analyzed in his theory of the vanguard party, the argument that the working class, left to its own spontaneous political development, tends to develop only trade union consciousness (consciousness of immediate economic interests) rather than revolutionary political consciousness, and that a party of professional revolutionaries is necessary to introduce revolutionary consciousness from outside the spontaneous movement.

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For the EBWM, the 1969 uprising provided a powerful practical lesson in the relationship between spontaneous mass movements and organized revolutionary leadership. The movement showed that the Bengali people had enormous reserves of political energy and willingness for struggle. It also showed that in the absence of a strong revolutionary organization with a clear class line and a developed theoretical framework, that energy would be channeled by the existing political leadership, the Awami League, into demands that would ultimately serve the interests of the Bengali petty bourgeoisie and emerging bourgeoisie rather than the interests of the working class and peasantry.

6.3 The Fall of Ayub Khan, the Yahya Interlude, and the Road to the 1970 Elections

The immediate political outcome of the 1969 uprising was the resignation of Ayub Khan on March 25, 1969, and the transfer of power to another military figure, General Yahya Khan, who declared martial law and assumed the presidency. The fall of Ayub was a significant political event that changed the political landscape in which the EBWM operated.

Yahya Khan's government made a fateful decision in 1969 and 1970 to hold genuinely free general elections for a constituent assembly that would draft a new constitution. This decision was driven by a combination of factors, including Yahya's calculation that the major political parties would not be able to agree on constitutional arrangements (which would allow continued military rule) and international pressure for a return to civilian government. Whatever Yahya's calculations, the decision to hold free elections on the basis of one person, one vote had enormous implications for East Pakistan, which had a majority of Pakistan's total population.

The December 1970 general elections were a political earthquake. The Awami League, running on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Six-Point Programme for Bengali autonomy, won an absolute majority in the national assembly, taking 160 out of 162 seats allocated to East Pakistan. The Pakistan Peoples Party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto won a majority of the West Pakistan seats but nothing in the east. The arithmetic was clear: if the election results were respected, the Awami League would form the national government and implement the Six-Point Programme.

The response of the West Pakistani political and military establishment to this outcome was a refusal to accept it. Bhutto threatened to boycott the constituent assembly. Yahya Khan, under pressure from the military establishment, first postponed the assembly session and then, in the night of March 25 to 26, 1971, launched Operation Searchlight, a military assault on East Pakistan designed to destroy the political leadership and mass organizational capacity of the Bengali nationalist movement.

For the EBWM, the political dynamics of 1969 to 1971 posed difficult theoretical and practical questions. The Six-Point Programme of the Awami League, which called for a federal constitution with maximum provincial autonomy, a separate foreign exchange account for East Pakistan, the right of East Pakistan to trade independently with foreign countries, and the right to maintain a separate paramilitary force, was not a revolutionary programme. It was a programme for significant Bengali autonomy within a Pakistani federal framework. From Sikder's

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perspective, it represented the maximum programme of the Bengali national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, a programme that would end the most egregious forms of West Pakistani economic exploitation while preserving the class structure of exploitation within East Bengal.

This analysis was both theoretically coherent and politically problematic. It was theoretically coherent because there was genuine evidence that the primary beneficiaries of Awami League politics would be the Bengali commercial and professional class rather than the working class and peasantry. It was politically problematic because the Six-Point Programme commanded enormous popular support among precisely the classes that the EBWM sought to represent. The EBWM's analysis that the Awami League's programme was limited and class-interested was correct in a theoretical sense, but it did not immediately translate into an alternative popular politics because the Awami League had successfully constructed a cross-class national unity around the demand for Bengali rights.

6.4 Theoretical Interlude: Revolutionary Strategy in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Conditions

This is a good moment to pause from the chronological narrative and examine the theoretical frameworks that Sikder was developing during 1968 to 1971, because those frameworks directly shaped the organizational decisions and political positions of the EBWM and later the Sarbahara Party throughout the critical period of the liberation war and its aftermath.

Sikder's foundational theoretical statement was the December 1968 thesis of the EBWM, titled "How Shall We Apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought to the Condition of Revolution of Our Country." This document established the core theoretical positions that would guide the EBWM and the Sarbahara Party throughout Sikder's lifetime and beyond. It is worth examining its main arguments in detail.

The first major theoretical argument of the 1968 thesis was the colonial thesis: East Bengal is a colony of Pakistan. This was not merely a rhetorical flourish but a substantive analytical claim. Sikder argued that the relationship between East Bengal and the Pakistani state had all of the essential features of a colonial relationship: systematic economic extraction (the transfer of resources and foreign exchange from east to west), political domination (the denial of democratic self-governance to the Bengali majority), cultural subordination (the imposition of Urdu against Bengali), and military control (the Pakistani armed forces as an instrument of occupation). The analytical category of colonialism was the right one for understanding this relationship because it captured the fundamental character of the power relation and because it connected East Bengal's situation to the global history of anti-colonial struggle from which the most relevant revolutionary lessons could be drawn.

The second major theoretical argument was the identification of the principal contradiction. Following Mao Zedong's theoretical framework developed in "On Contradiction," Sikder argued that the principal contradiction in East Bengal's social formation was the contradiction between the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and feudalists of Pakistan on one side and the people of East Bengal

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on the other. This identification of the principal contradiction had important strategic implications. It meant that the primary task of the revolutionary movement at the current historical stage was the resolution of this contradiction through the national liberation of East Bengal from Pakistani colonial rule. Other contradictions, including the contradiction between exploiting and exploited classes within East Bengal, were secondary contradictions at this stage, to be addressed after or in conjunction with the resolution of the principal contradiction.

The third major theoretical argument concerned the class nature of the revolution. Following Mao's theory of new democracy, Sikder argued that the revolution in East Bengal was not a socialist revolution but a new democratic revolution, a revolution that would overthrow imperialism, feudalism, and comprador capitalism but would not immediately proceed to socialist construction. The revolution would be led by the proletariat (working class) through its communist party, but it would involve a broad united front of all classes that could be united against the principal enemy: the workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, and a section of the national bourgeoisie (those who were genuinely independent of foreign capital and not serving as intermediaries for colonial exploitation).

The fourth major theoretical argument concerned revolutionary strategy. Sikder adopted Mao Zedong's strategy of protracted people's war: the strategy of building rural base areas under the military and political control of the revolutionary party, gradually encircling the cities from the countryside, and progressively eroding the power of the enemy until the conditions existed for decisive military engagement. This strategy was explicitly contrasted with the urban insurrectionary strategy associated with Lenin's Bolshevik Revolution, which Sikder regarded as inapplicable to the conditions of East Bengal, and with the foco theory associated with Che Guevara and Regis Debray, which Sikder regarded as adventurist in its belief that a small armed group could ignite a revolutionary conflagration without prior mass political organization.

These four theoretical arguments, the colonial thesis, the identification of the principal contradiction, the theory of new democratic revolution, and the strategy of protracted people's war, formed a coherent and internally consistent theoretical framework. What the events of 1969 to 1971 would test was whether this framework could be applied to the actual conditions of East Bengal, conditions that differed in important ways from the Chinese case from which Mao's theory was derived.

6.4.1 The Problem of Theoretical Transfer: Mao's China and Sikder's Bengal

The question of the applicability of Mao's theoretical framework to East Bengal is one that scholars have debated extensively, and it is important to examine it carefully rather than either accepting it uncritically or dismissing it superficially.

The most important differences between the Chinese and East Bengali cases are geographical, social, and political. China is a vast continental country with diverse terrain, including large areas of mountainous and rural territory that were genuinely capable of providing the kind of isolated base areas that Mao's strategy required. East Bengal is a small, densely populated, flat

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river delta with no comparable terrain for guerrilla warfare. Every part of East Bengal is accessible by river and road. There are no mountains, no remote forest areas comparable to the Yenan base area, and the population density makes it very difficult to establish and maintain the kind of rural base areas that Mao's strategy envisioned.

The social structure of China in Mao's period was dominated by a massive peasantry that had very limited engagement with the urban economy and that could be organized through village-level political work into a revolutionary force capable of sustained military struggle. East Bengal in the 1960s and 1970s had a peasantry with deeper connections to the urban economy through markets and migration, a higher rate of literacy than Mao's China, and a more complex relationship to political parties and political organizations that had been operating openly for decades.

The political context was also different. China's revolution took place over more than two decades (1927 to 1949) in conditions of fragmented state power (the warlord period), Japanese invasion (1937 to 1945), and civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists. East Bengal was a more politically integrated territory with a functioning (if colonial) state apparatus, and the revolutionary window of opportunity that Sikder was trying to exploit was very short by comparison with the Chinese revolutionary period.

These differences did not necessarily mean that Mao's framework was inapplicable to East Bengal, but they meant that its application required significant theoretical and strategic adaptation. Sikder was aware of this and attempted to address it in his theoretical writings, developing what might be called a "Bengali Maoism" that adapted the general framework to local conditions. The question of whether his adaptations were adequate is one of the central analytical problems of this part of the textbook.

Contemporary theoretical scholarship has developed sophisticated tools for analyzing this kind of theoretical transfer. The philosopher Costas Douzinas, writing on the philosophy of revolution in 2024, has emphasized the importance of what he calls "contextual fidelity" in revolutionary theory: the requirement that theoretical frameworks be applied not in a mechanical or dogmatic way but in ways that are genuinely responsive to the specific conditions of the particular context. From this perspective, the most important question about Sikder's application of Mao's theory is not whether it faithfully reproduced the Chinese framework but whether it genuinely engaged with the specific conditions of East Bengal and whether the adaptations it made were theoretically coherent and practically adequate.

The recent scholarship of Alex Diceanu and others working in the field of comparative revolutionary studies has also emphasized the importance of what might be called "strategic imagination" in revolutionary leadership: the capacity to think creatively about the specific organizational and military forms appropriate to particular historical conditions rather than simply applying models derived from other contexts. From this perspective, Sikder's willingness to innovate, to think about the liberation war as an opportunity to establish rural base areas in the southern delta region, to develop an independent military force rather than subordinating his

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movement to the Awami League's Mukti Bahini, and to insist on maintaining the class line of the revolution even during the national liberation war, represents a form of strategic creativity that deserves serious evaluation on its own terms.

6.5 The Mass Line and the Problem of Popular Politics

One of the most important concepts in Mao Zedong's political theory is the mass line, and its relationship to Sikder's practice deserves extended analysis. The mass line is a method of political leadership that Mao summarized in the formula: "take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action."

The mass line is simultaneously a theory of political knowledge (how the revolutionary party acquires the knowledge it needs to lead effectively), a theory of political practice (how the party translates theoretical analysis into mass action), and a theory of leadership (how the vanguard party maintains its connection to and accountability to the masses it seeks to lead). It is a sophisticated theoretical response to two opposite errors: the error of commandism, in which the party simply issues commands to the masses based on its own abstract theoretical knowledge without regard to the actual consciousness and conditions of the masses, and the error of tailism, in which the party simply follows the spontaneous impulses of the masses without providing the organized leadership and theoretical clarity that is necessary for revolutionary progress.

For the EBWM, the mass line was both a theoretical principle and an organizational challenge. As an underground organization of educated urban youth from primarily petty bourgeois backgrounds, the EBWM's capacity to apply the mass line in its full Maoist sense was necessarily limited. The organization was not embedded in the daily life of the peasant villages or the factory floors in the way that would be required to genuinely "take the ideas of the masses" and translate them into concentrated political programme. This was a structural limitation that Sikder himself recognized, and it shaped the organization's approach to political work throughout the period covered in this Part.

The 2024 scholarship of political theorist Jodi Dean, in her work on communist horizon and mass politics, provides a useful framework for understanding this problem. Dean argues that revolutionary organizations in the contemporary period face a fundamental tension between the organizational discipline and theoretical coherence required for effective political action and the imperatives of mass democratic engagement. This tension is not new, it is precisely the tension that Lenin analyzed in "What Is to Be Done?" and that Mao addressed through the mass line, but it takes on particular forms in different historical and social contexts. For Sikder's EBWM, the tension manifested as a persistent gap between the organization's theoretical sophistication and its actual mass base, a gap that would have significant consequences for the later history of the Sarbahara Party.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: OPERATION SEARCHLIGHT, THE LIBERATION WAR, AND THE SARBAHARA'S INDEPENDENT PATH

7.1 The Night of March 25 to 26, 1971: The Beginning of Genocide

The events of the night of March 25 to 26, 1971, when the Pakistani military launched Operation Searchlight against the Bengali population of East Pakistan, represent one of the most horrific acts of state violence in the history of the twentieth century. Understanding these events in their full dimension is essential both for historical understanding and for grasping the political and moral context in which Siraj Sikder and the EBWM made their decisions during the liberation war.

Operation Searchlight was carefully planned and deliberately executed. Pakistani military units, which had been reinforced in the preceding weeks under the cover of routine troop rotations, began simultaneous attacks in Dhaka and in other major cities across East Pakistan at midnight on March 25. The targeting was systematic: the University of Dhaka, where student leaders and faculty were killed in their dormitories and quarters; the Hindu neighborhoods of Dhaka, which were subjected to mass killing and arson; the barracks of the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles, Bengali military units that were suspected of potential mutiny; the offices of the Awami League and of newspapers that had been critical of the military; and specific individuals who had been identified as political leaders or organizers.

The scale of the killing in the first days and weeks of Operation Searchlight was enormous. The most careful scholarly estimates, drawing on demographic analysis and historical documentation, suggest that somewhere between 300,000 and 3,000,000 people were killed during the nine months of the liberation war. The wide range of this estimate reflects the difficulty of establishing accurate figures for mass atrocities in a context where records were systematically destroyed and witnesses were often killed. What is not in serious dispute is that the Pakistani military and its Bengali collaborators, the Al-Badr and Al-Shams militias drawn from the Jamaat-e-Islami political party, conducted systematic massacres, targeted killings of intellectuals and political leaders, mass rape, and forced displacement on a massive scale.

The jurisprudential significance of these events is profound and extends well beyond the historical narrative. Operation Searchlight raised fundamental questions about the nature of state sovereignty, about the legal and moral status of secession and self-determination under international law, about the responsibility of the international community in the face of mass atrocities, and about the relationship between law and political legitimacy. These questions were not merely academic in 1971; they were urgent practical questions that Siraj Sikder and the EBWM had to grapple with in deciding how to respond to the Pakistani military assault.

The international law framework governing these events was in a state of significant development in 1971. The Genocide Convention of 1948 had defined genocide as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. Whether what the Pakistani military was doing in East Pakistan constituted genocide

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under this legal definition was a question that international lawyers and governments debated at the time and have continued to debate since. The Bangladesh government has formally declared that the events of 1971 constituted genocide. The Pakistani government has never accepted this characterization. International scholars are divided, with most taking the position that while the killing was on a massive scale and was targeted at specific groups, it does not meet all of the legal criteria for genocide under the Genocide Convention.

What is beyond serious dispute is that Operation Searchlight represented a massive crime against humanity, an assault on a civilian population by a state that was attempting to use overwhelming military force to crush a democratic political movement. This fact had significant implications for the question of the right to resist. International law has historically been reluctant to recognize a right of armed resistance against state violence, preferring to channel political conflicts through legal and diplomatic mechanisms. But the extreme character of the Pakistani military's violence, combined with the collapse of any legal or constitutional avenue for East Pakistani self-governance, created a situation in which armed resistance was not merely morally justified but practically necessary for the survival of the Bengali people.

7.2 The EBWM's Response to the Liberation War: A Distinctive Strategic Choice

When the Pakistani military launched Operation Searchlight, the East Bengal Workers Movement was still a small, clandestine organization with a limited number of cadres and no significant military capacity. Sikder himself was in Dhaka when the assault began, and he and his comrades were immediately confronted with life-or-death decisions about where to go, what to do, and how the EBWM's political project could survive and advance in the radically transformed conditions of the liberation war.

Sikder's response to this situation was both strategically creative and theoretically consistent. He decided to move to Barisal in the southern delta region, which he recognized as a potential zone for establishing the kind of rural base areas that his Maoist framework called for. The Barisal district, with its network of rivers and canals, its agricultural peasant population, and its relatively peripheral position in relation to the major Pakistani military concentrations (which were initially focused on Dhaka and other major cities), offered possibilities for organizing armed resistance that the major urban centers did not.

The decision to go to Barisal rather than to India (where the Awami League leadership and much of the Mukti Bahini were being organized with Indian support) was not an accident. It reflected the EBWM's fundamental theoretical and political position that the liberation war must not be allowed to become simply a nationalist armed movement under bourgeois leadership, but must be the occasion for building the revolutionary organizational and military infrastructure of a proletarian party that could continue the struggle for genuine social transformation after independence. Going to India would have meant operating under the supervision and within the political framework of the Indian government and the Awami League, which would have required subordinating the EBWM's independent political line to the demands of the nationalist coalition.

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On April 30, 1971, Sikder formed the Purba Banglar Sashastra Dheshapremik Bahini, the Armed Patriotic Force of East Bengal, at Swarupkathi in the Barisal district. The formation of this armed force was a critical organizational moment. It was simultaneously a practical military initiative, organizing armed resistance against the Pakistani military in the southern delta, and a political statement of independence from the Awami League's Mukti Bahini. The PBSD and the Mukti Bahini were both fighting against the Pakistani military, but they were doing so under different political flags, with different class orientations, and with different visions of what an independent Bangladesh would or should look like.

The political and theoretical logic of this position was coherent within Sikder's framework. Mao's theory of protracted people's war placed enormous emphasis on the political character of the revolutionary armed force: the idea that the army of the revolutionary party must be not merely a military instrument but a political organization that simultaneously fights the enemy, builds the mass political base, and educates the population in the revolutionary programme. A people's army, in the Maoist conception, is a school of political consciousness as well as a fighting force. The PBSD was intended to be this kind of force, and its formation in the specific geographic and social terrain of the southern Barisal delta was an attempt to establish the kind of rural revolutionary base that Mao's strategy envisioned.

The practical implementation of this strategy, however, faced enormous challenges. The EBWM was a tiny organization with a very limited number of trained cadres. It had no established networks in the rural areas of Barisal. It had no weapons stockpiles or military training facilities. And it was operating in a context of extreme violence and danger, where both the Pakistani military and its collaborators were actively hunting political organizers and where the political loyalties of the rural population were highly complex and uncertain.

7.3 The Establishment of the Peyarabagan Base Area

The name Peyarabagan, literally "guava garden," refers to the area in Bhimruli, Jhalokati district (then part of the Barisal administrative region), where Sikder and the EBWM established their primary base area during the liberation war. The choice of this location was strategically significant.

The southern delta region around Barisal is one of the most waterlogged areas of Bengal, a landscape of rivers, canals, and seasonal floods that provides natural obstacles to military movement and creates pockets of geographical isolation that can be used for guerrilla bases. The guava gardens and orchards of the area, densely cultivated and providing significant vegetative cover, offered concealment for small groups of fighters and organizers. The peasant population of the area, predominantly poor sharecroppers and agricultural laborers, was among the most economically exploited in East Bengal, and therefore potentially receptive to the Sarbahara's class-based political message.

The establishment of the Peyarabagan base was more than a military initiative. It was an attempt to demonstrate, in practical organizational form, what a revolutionary base area in the Maoist

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sense would look like in the Bengali context. The EBWM's cadres, based at Peyarabagan, were instructed to do political work among the surrounding peasant communities, to help organize village-level structures, to adjudicate local disputes in ways that served the interests of the poor, and to develop the mass political consciousness that would be necessary for sustained revolutionary struggle.

Contemporary accounts and later historical investigations, including the research compiled by journalist and historian Mohiuddin Ahmad in his book "Lal Shontrash" (Red Terror) published in 2021, provide a partial picture of the activities at the Peyarabagan base. The accounts suggest that Sikder and his comrades were genuinely committed to the political as well as military dimensions of their work, that they organized literacy classes and political education sessions alongside military training, and that they made real efforts to connect with the local peasant population. At the same time, the accounts also suggest the limitations of what a small group of primarily urban educated youth could accomplish in a short period in an unfamiliar rural environment under the extraordinary pressures of the liberation war.

The independence of the Peyarabagan base from the Awami League's broader liberation war network was both its political strength and its practical weakness. Its strength was that it allowed the EBWM to maintain its distinctive class line and organizational identity, to demonstrate through practice that there was an alternative revolutionary leadership to the Awami League, and to build the nucleus of a genuinely proletarian revolutionary organization. Its weakness was that it deprived the EBWM of the resources, the weapons, the training, and the logistical support that the Mukti Bahini was receiving through the Indian military's operation Jackpot and related programs.

7.4 The Founding of the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party: June 3, 1971

On June 3, 1971, at a meeting held at the Peyarabagan base area, Siraj Sikder formally founded the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party, the Proletarian Party of East Bengal. This event, which took place in the middle of the liberation war, while Pakistani military forces were conducting systematic violence across East Pakistan and while the Mukti Bahini was being organized under Indian military direction, was one of the most significant organizational acts in the history of the Bangladeshi left.

The founding of the PBSP was not simply the renaming of the EBWM. It represented a qualitative organizational transformation, from a clandestine study and propaganda group into a full political party with a programme, a constitution, a military wing, and the explicit intention of competing for political leadership of the revolution. The party's name was carefully chosen: "Sarbahara" means "those who have nothing" in Bengali, a translation of the word "proletarian" that simultaneously evokes the international socialist tradition and the specific condition of the Bengali landless laborers and poor peasants who were the party's intended primary constituency. The word carries a moral as well as economic weight: it suggests not merely poverty but a condition of radical deprivation that demands radical transformation.

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The founding documents of the PBSP, including the draft party constitution that Sikder wrote in September 1971, established the theoretical and organizational foundations of the new party. The party's guiding ideology was declared to be Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, the theoretical synthesis that had emerged from the Sino-Soviet split and that distinguished Maoist parties from both Soviet-aligned and other communist parties. The party was committed to the strategy of protracted people's war and to the goal of a new democratic revolution that would sweep away imperialism, feudalism, and comprador capitalism and lay the foundations for socialist construction.

The organizational principles of the PBSP, as set out in the draft constitution, reflected Leninist democratic centralism: the party was to be organized on a strict hierarchical basis, with decisions made by democratic discussion within the party but then binding on all members and implemented as centrally directed. The principle of "criticism and self-criticism" (borrowed from Maoist organizational practice) was built into the party's internal life as a mechanism for identifying and correcting political and organizational errors. The party's discipline was strict: members were expected to subordinate their personal interests to the party's interests, to accept party decisions even when they personally disagreed with them, and to maintain the security of the organization against infiltration and betrayal.

These organizational principles reflected genuine revolutionary necessity under conditions of clandestine struggle against a militarily superior enemy. Loose organizational structures and unlimited internal debate might be appropriate for political parties operating in open democratic conditions, but they were potentially fatal for a clandestine revolutionary organization facing active state repression. The strict discipline of the PBSP was a practical security requirement as much as a theoretical preference.

But strict organizational discipline also carried significant risks, risks that would become visible in the later history of the Sarbahara Party. The concentration of political authority in the hands of the party leadership, combined with the intense pressures of clandestine existence and armed struggle, created conditions in which the leadership's judgment could not be effectively questioned or corrected by internal mechanisms. The history of the Sarbahara Party would show both the strengths and the dangers of its organizational model, and any honest assessment of Sikder's legacy must grapple with both dimensions.

7.5 The Class Line During the Liberation War: A Theoretical and Political Controversy

One of the most controversial aspects of the PBSP's conduct during the liberation war was its maintenance of a strict class line that led it to treat certain sections of the Bengali population as enemies even while fighting against the Pakistani military. This position has been the subject of intense historical debate and moral criticism, and it deserves careful and honest examination.

The PBSP's class analysis identified several categories of Bengali people as collaborators with or agents of the oppressive order: large landlords who were using the chaos of the war to accumulate land and exploit the peasantry, moneylenders who were using the conditions of

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economic devastation to trap peasants in debt bondage, Razakars (Bengali collaborators with the Pakistani military who were providing intelligence and participating in atrocities), and individuals who were using their political connections to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor.

The PBSP's cadres, including the Armed Patriotic Force, carried out actions against these individuals during the liberation war. Some of these actions involved the killing of individuals identified as class enemies, landlords, moneylenders, and Razakars. The opening episode in the Jamhoor article on Siraj Sikder, described in the sources, gives one example: the killing of Adam Ali, identified as a traitor who had put his fellow villagers in danger, by EBWM members in Jhalokathi in April 1971.

These actions were justified within the PBSP's theoretical framework as legitimate acts of class struggle and revolutionary justice: the elimination of class enemies who were exploiting the poor and collaborating with the occupation. They are extremely controversial from both legal and moral perspectives. From a legal perspective, the international humanitarian law governing armed conflict (then embodied primarily in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their subsequent development) prohibits the killing of civilians who are not directly participating in hostilities, regardless of their class position or political sympathies. The PBSP's killings of landlords and moneylenders who were not armed combatants could not be justified under this legal framework, whatever the political justification offered.

From a moral perspective, the killings raise profound questions about the ethics of revolutionary violence. The claim that individuals can be legitimately killed because of their class position, because they are landlords or moneylenders, rather than because of specific violent acts they have committed, is a form of collective punishment that most ethical frameworks reject. It is a logic that, once accepted, can be and has been extended to justify atrocities far beyond anything that the initial revolutionary programme envisioned.

At the same time, any honest moral analysis must acknowledge the context in which these actions took place. The liberation war of 1971 was not an ordinary political conflict. It was a war of survival against a military that was committing genocide. The Razakars who collaborated with the Pakistani military were directly complicit in the murder of Bengali civilians, the rape of Bengali women, and the destruction of Bengali communities. The moral assessment of actions against these individuals under these conditions is genuinely complex, whatever the legal analysis suggests.

For our purposes, the important point is that the PBSP's maintenance of a class line during the liberation war, its refusal to subsume class contradictions within a simple narrative of national unity against a common enemy, was both a principled political position and a source of significant practical and moral problems. The principled dimension was the refusal to pretend that national liberation alone, without social transformation, would serve the interests of the working class and peasantry. The problematic dimension was the violence that accompanied the

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implementation of this class line and the political isolation that it created for the PBSP in relation to the broader liberation movement.

The contemporary theoretical literature on revolutionary violence and political ethics provides useful frameworks for analyzing these questions. The philosopher Michael Walzer, in his classic work "Just and Unjust Wars" (1977) and in subsequent writings, developed a theory of political violence that distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate targets of revolutionary action and argues for a principle of discrimination (targeting only combatants and direct agents of violence, not civilians who happen to belong to a particular class or group). This principle, which has deep roots in international humanitarian law, condemns the PBSP's killings of landlords and moneylenders qua landlords and moneylenders, regardless of the broader political context.

A different perspective is offered by Fanon's analysis of colonial violence in "The Wretched of the Earth," which argues that the violence of the colonized against the colonizer is not merely politically justified but psychologically and socially necessary for the liberation of the colonized from the internalized structures of colonial subjugation. Fanon's argument, which was explicitly theoretical and philosophical rather than a justification for any specific act of violence, has been extensively criticized (not least by Hannah Arendt in her essay "On Violence") but it captures something important about the way in which political violence is experienced and understood by those who engage in it from a position of profound historical oppression.

Neither Walzer nor Fanon provides a complete or satisfactory answer to the moral questions raised by the PBSP's conduct during the liberation war. What they do provide is a theoretical framework for thinking seriously about those questions, which is more useful than either the uncritical celebration of all revolutionary violence or the condemnation of all political violence from a position of comfortable distance.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE FOUNDING PROGRAMME: THEORY, CONSTITUTION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE SARBAHARA PARTY

8.1 The Draft Constitution of September 1971: A Document Analysis

In September 1971, while the liberation war was still ongoing and the outcome of the conflict remained uncertain, Siraj Sikder produced the draft constitution of the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party. This document is one of the most important primary sources for understanding Sikder's political thought and organizational vision, and it deserves detailed analysis.

The constitution begins by establishing the PBSP's ideological foundation: Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. This formulation is significant in several ways. It explicitly rejects "Maoism" as a term (a position that Sikder maintained consistently, noting that during the 1960s the followers of the Mao-line identified their ideology as Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought rather than "Maoism"), and it places Mao's contributions within the tradition of

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Marxism and Leninism rather than treating them as a qualitative departure from that tradition. This position reflected both a specific theoretical judgment (that Mao's contributions were applications and developments of Marxism-Leninism rather than a new independent theoretical system) and a political judgment (that the claim of a specifically "Maoist" ideology was associated with a sectarian fragmentation of the revolutionary movement that was not serving the cause of revolutionary unity).

The constitution's section on party membership establishes strict criteria. A party member must accept the party's programme and constitution, must pay party dues, and must belong to a party organization and participate in its work. There is no provision for passive or nominal membership. Every member is expected to be an active participant in the party's organizational and political work. This reflects the Leninist concept of the party as an organization of professional revolutionaries rather than a broad-based political organization with a mass membership of varying levels of engagement.

The constitution establishes a hierarchical organizational structure: village party committees and factory party cells at the base level, district committees at an intermediate level, a regional committee, and the party congress as the supreme authority, with the central committee elected by the party congress as the leading body between congresses. The principle of democratic centralism governs the relationship between these levels: lower bodies elect and are accountable to higher bodies, and decisions of higher bodies are binding on lower bodies.

The specific provisions on discipline are revealing. The constitution provides for the expulsion of members who engage in factionalism (organizing within the party against party decisions), who provide information to the enemy, who commit serious political errors, or who violate party discipline. The procedures for discipline hearings are outlined but are relatively brief and do not include the kind of robust due process protections that would be found in a legal system. In a clandestine revolutionary party operating under conditions of state repression, formal due process was genuinely difficult to maintain, but the relative brevity of the disciplinary provisions would become problematic in the later history of the party.

The constitution's section on the party's relations with mass organizations outlines the expected relationship between the PBSP and the trade unions, peasant associations, women's organizations, and student organizations that it intended to influence and lead. The party was to maintain its organizational independence from these mass organizations while providing political leadership through the work of its members within them. This is the standard Leninist model of the "transmission belt" relationship between the vanguard party and mass organizations, but it required a level of organizational sophistication and mass implantation that the PBSP was far from achieving in September 1971.

8.2 The Programme of New Democratic Revolution: Specific Content and Implications

The PBSP's political programme, as set out in its founding documents, called for a new democratic revolution that would achieve several specific objectives: the independence of East

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Bengal from Pakistani colonial rule, the destruction of feudal land relations and the distribution of land to the landless, the nationalization of major industries and financial institutions, the achievement of full national sovereignty independent of imperialist powers (explicitly including the United States, the Soviet Union, and India, which the PBSP regarded as a regional expansionist power), and the establishment of a People's Democratic Republic of East Bengal.

Each of these programmatic points deserves examination both in its theoretical context and in relation to the actual historical conditions of 1971.

The demand for full national independence from Pakistan was the point of greatest overlap between the PBSP's programme and the mainstream Bengali nationalist movement led by the Awami League. Both demanded an independent Bangladesh (though the PBSP used the term "East Bengal" rather than "Bangladesh," reflecting its position that the national question was not yet fully resolved and that the boundaries and character of the new state remained to be determined). But the PBSP's independence demand was embedded in a different class analysis and served different political ends. For the Awami League, independence was the conclusion of the struggle, the achievement of the national aspiration for self-governance. For the PBSP, independence was a necessary condition for but not the conclusion of the revolutionary process: it was the resolution of the principal contradiction (between East Bengali people and Pakistani colonial rule) that would then make possible the assault on the secondary contradictions (between exploiting and exploited classes within East Bengal).

The land reform demand, the destruction of feudal land relations and the distribution of land to the landless, went significantly further than anything in the Awami League's programme. The Awami League, whose social base included significant sections of the rural middle class and the urban commercial class, was not committed to radical land redistribution. The PBSP's land reform demand was a genuinely revolutionary programme element that distinguished the party's vision of post-independence Bangladesh from the Awami League's vision and represented a direct challenge to the interests of the landlord class that the Awami League's leadership partly represented.

The anti-imperialist and anti-expansionist dimension of the PBSP's programme, its explicit identification of the Soviet Union as a "social-imperialist" power and of India as a regional expansionist power alongside the United States as an imperialist power, was particularly distinctive and politically consequential. This "three mountains" formulation (borrowed from Mao's characterization of the three main enemies of the Chinese revolution as imperialism, feudalism, and comprador capitalism) reflected the pro-Chinese theoretical alignment of the PBSP and was directed against both Soviet revisionism (the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union, which the Chinese and their allies characterized as having betrayed socialist principles in favor of great-power politics) and Indian regional dominance.

The anti-Indian dimension of this position was theoretically coherent within the PBSP's framework but politically extremely controversial in the context of the 1971 liberation war. India was providing direct military, political, and logistical support to the liberation movement, and the

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Indian military's intervention in December 1971 was the decisive military factor in Pakistan's defeat. To characterize India as an expansionist power and an enemy of genuine Bengali liberation at the same moment that India was making this support available required a theoretical commitment to a long-term class analysis over short-term political expediency that most political actors would have found extremely difficult to maintain.

Sikder maintained this position consistently. He argued that India's support for the liberation movement was motivated not by solidarity with the Bengali people but by its own strategic interests in weakening Pakistan and potentially establishing a dependent client state in East Bengal. This was a position that had genuine analytical merit as an assessment of Indian strategic motivation, but it did not necessarily follow that Bengali acceptance of Indian military assistance was politically wrong or that the Indian-supported liberation movement was not genuinely serving the interests of the Bengali people despite Indian strategic interests. The relationship between the motivations of political actors and the consequences of their actions is complex, and Sikder's insistence on evaluating the liberation movement primarily through the lens of Indian strategic interests was, critics have argued, a case of theoretical rigidity overriding practical political judgment.

8.3 The Philosophy of the Vanguard Party: Lenin, Mao, and Sikder

The theoretical foundation of the PBSP's organizational model was the Leninist concept of the vanguard party, as developed and modified by Mao Zedong's organizational theory and practice. This concept, which has been one of the most contested in the history of radical political theory, deserves extended examination in this section.

Lenin's argument for the vanguard party, developed most fully in "What Is to Be Done?" (1902), was both a theory of organization and a theory of political consciousness. Lenin argued that the working class, in the conditions of capitalist society, would develop on its own only "trade union consciousness," awareness of immediate economic interests and the capacity to organize around them. Revolutionary political consciousness, the understanding that the entire capitalist system must be overthrown and replaced by a fundamentally different social order, would not develop spontaneously from the working class's own experience of exploitation. It had to be introduced into the working class movement from outside, by educated revolutionary intellectuals who had absorbed the theoretical insights of Marxist science.

The vanguard party was the organizational form through which this revolutionary consciousness was to be introduced into the working class movement and translated into revolutionary political action. The party was to be composed of professional revolutionaries, people who had dedicated themselves full-time to the revolutionary cause and who had mastered the theoretical and practical skills required for revolutionary leadership. This was explicitly contrasted with the model of a mass membership party in which all sympathizers with socialist goals could join and participate in proportion to their level of engagement.

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The jurisprudential and philosophical critique of Leninist vanguardism is extensive and sophisticated. Rosa Luxemburg, writing in the same period as Lenin, argued that Lenin's organizational model confused the objective difficulty of building a revolutionary movement with an inherent defect in the working class's capacity for self-organization. Luxemburg insisted that revolutionary consciousness could and must develop from the working class's own experience of struggle, and that a party of professional revolutionaries imposed from above would tend to substitute itself for the working class rather than genuinely representing and expressing its interests.

The anarchist tradition, from Bakunin through Kropotkin to Emma Goldman, raised similar objections from a different theoretical starting point: the argument that any organization based on centralized authority and hierarchical discipline tends to reproduce, in its own internal structure, the authoritarian relations that it seeks to overthrow in the broader society, and that the revolutionary party modeled on Leninist lines would inevitably become a new form of domination rather than a genuine instrument of liberation.

These critiques were well-known to Sikder, who had read widely in the Marxist and revolutionary tradition. His response, consistent with his Maoist framework, was to argue that the mass line was the organizational mechanism through which the potential authoritarianism of the vanguard party model was prevented: by insisting on a constant dialectical relationship between the party and the masses, by making the party's work always responsive to the actual conditions and consciousness of the people it sought to lead, the mass line prevented the party from becoming a self-enclosed bureaucracy divorced from its claimed social base.

The problem, as the later history of the Sarbahara Party would show, was that the mass line is an organizational principle that is very difficult to implement under conditions of clandestine struggle and intense state repression. When the party cannot openly discuss its positions with the masses, when its cadres must operate in secrecy, when every internal disagreement is potentially a security threat, the structural conditions for genuine mass line practice do not exist. The result is that the vanguard party, operating underground, tends to substitute its own internal consensus for the actual consciousness of the masses, a form of internal authoritarianism that cannot be checked either by genuine mass input or by the kind of open public criticism that democratic accountability requires.

8.4 The National Question and the Theory of Self-Determination in International Law and Political Philosophy

The PBSP's programme called for the self-determination of the Bengali people, and its founding was premised on the theoretical claim that this self-determination required not merely national independence from Pakistan but a specific form of independence: a People's Democratic Republic governed under the leadership of the proletariat and its communist party. This position raised profound questions about the relationship between the principle of national self-determination and the theory of revolutionary socialist transformation.

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The principle of national self-determination has a complex history in both international law and political theory. Its modern formulation derives primarily from Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (1918) and from Lenin's theory of the right of nations to self-determination. These two formulations, though they reached similar surface conclusions about the right of peoples to determine their own political status, were based on fundamentally different theoretical premises. Wilson's formulation was liberal, based on the idea that legitimate governance requires the consent of the governed and that peoples sharing a common national identity should have the right to form their own states. Lenin's formulation was Marxist, based on the idea that national oppression was a form of class oppression and that communist parties should support the right of oppressed nations to self-determination as part of the strategy for building a broad revolutionary alliance against imperialism.

The development of international law on self-determination after World War II was primarily in the liberal Wilsonian tradition. The United Nations Charter of 1945 affirmed the principle of self-determination, and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples of 1960 (UN General Assembly Resolution 1514) gave the principle specific application to the decolonization context. However, international law as it developed in the postwar period was deeply ambivalent about the right to secession: it affirmed self-determination in the abstract while generally favoring the territorial integrity of existing states against secessionist movements.

The Bangladesh case of 1971 was a significant test of these legal principles. The argument for East Bengali self-determination rested on the claim that the Bengali majority of Pakistan had been denied meaningful democratic self-governance, that the Pakistani military assault of March 1971 had destroyed any remaining possibility of resolving the constitutional crisis through peaceful means, and that the genocidal violence of the military campaign created a humanitarian emergency that overrode normal principles of state sovereignty. The question of whether these factors were legally sufficient to justify both the Bengali declaration of independence and India's military intervention on behalf of the liberation movement was deeply contested in international legal circles at the time and has been extensively analyzed by international lawyers in subsequent decades.

The most sophisticated contemporary analysis of this question in terms of international law and political philosophy is found in the extensive scholarship on humanitarian intervention and the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine that developed in the 1990s and 2000s in the aftermath of the failures of international intervention in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. This scholarship, which includes major contributions by scholars such as Nicholas Wheeler, Alex Bellamy, and Jennifer Welsh, provides a retrospective framework for evaluating the legal and moral dimensions of international responses to the 1971 crisis.

From the perspective of recent international law scholarship, the 1971 Bangladesh case can be seen as an early and important precedent for the argument that states that commit systematic mass atrocities against their own populations forfeit some of the normal protections of state sovereignty. This "remedial secession" argument, developed in academic philosophy by Allen

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Buchanan and others, holds that while there is no general right to secession in international law, a group that is subjected to systematic, severe, and ongoing violations of fundamental human rights and that has exhausted all other reasonable alternatives may acquire a right to secession as a remedy of last resort. The Bengali case in 1971 fits this framework reasonably well.

Sikder's position on these questions was theoretically more radical than the remedial secession framework suggests. For Sikder, the question was not merely whether East Bengal had the right to separate from Pakistan (which he had always maintained it did, as part of his colonial thesis), but what kind of East Bengal would emerge from independence and under whose political leadership. His insistence that genuine self-determination required a People's Democratic Republic rather than an Awami League government represented a view of self-determination that went beyond the formal legal concept to encompass questions of class power and social transformation.

CHAPTER NINE: THE INDEPENDENCE OF BANGLADESH, THE DECEMBER VICTORY, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

9.1 December 1971: The Indian Military Intervention and the Pakistani Surrender

The nine months of the liberation war, from March 25 to December 16, 1971, concluded with the most decisive military event in the modern history of South Asia: the complete defeat of the Pakistani military forces in East Pakistan and the surrender of approximately 93,000 Pakistani troops to the joint command of the Indian and Bangladeshi liberation forces. Bangladesh was born as an independent state.

The course of the military conflict during those nine months was complex and brutal. The Pakistani military, which had the overwhelming advantage in terms of training, equipment, and organizational capacity in the early stages, conducted a campaign of systematic violence against the Bengali civilian population that combined conventional military operations with deliberate terror. The Mukti Bahini, organized initially from Bengali soldiers and police who mutinied against the Pakistani military and subsequently expanded through mass recruitment among Bengali civilians, gradually developed into a significant fighting force with Indian military training and support. Throughout the conflict, tens of thousands of Bengali civilians died in the fighting, in deliberate massacres, and from the disease and deprivation that accompanied mass displacement.

The Indian military intervention began in early December 1971 and rapidly transformed the military balance. Indian forces entered East Pakistan from multiple directions, and the Pakistani military, already stretched thin by nine months of counterinsurgency operations and now facing a conventional military force far superior to the guerrilla tactics of the Mukti Bahini, was quickly overwhelmed. The surrender on December 16, 1971, was total and unconditional.

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For the PBSP and for Siraj Sikder personally, December 16 was simultaneously a moment of celebration and a moment of profound political challenge. The liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistani military rule was the resolution of what the PBSP had identified as the principal contradiction, the contradiction between the East Bengali people and Pakistani colonial rule. But the resolution of the principal contradiction in the formal terms of national independence did not, in the PBSP's theoretical framework, mean that the revolutionary struggle was concluded. It meant that the principal contradiction had changed: the primary enemy was no longer Pakistani colonialism but the class forces within Bangladesh that were seeking to consolidate their power through the independent Bangladeshi state.

This theoretical position was internally consistent with the PBSP's overall framework, but its application to the specific historical conditions of December 1971 required careful judgment about timing, tactics, and political priorities that was extremely difficult to make correctly. The overwhelming majority of the Bengali population was celebrating independence and regarding the Awami League government as the legitimate expression of their national liberation. To immediately pivot from fighting Pakistan to fighting the Awami League government would require the PBSP to swim very firmly against the current of popular political sentiment.

9.2 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Mujib Government, and the Class Character of the New State

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who returned to Bangladesh from Pakistani imprisonment in January 1972 and became the first prime minister of independent Bangladesh, was one of the most charismatic and politically significant figures in the history of the subcontinent. His popular authority in the immediate post-independence period was enormous: he was celebrated as "Bangabandhu" (Friend of Bengal), the father of the nation, the man whose political leadership had brought Bangladesh into existence. The emotional intensity of his welcome in January 1972, when he returned to Dhaka to be greeted by millions of celebrating Bangladeshis, is difficult to convey to those who did not witness it.

Sikder and the PBSP did not share this popular celebration of Mujib's leadership. Their analysis of the class character of the Awami League government, which they had been developing since the founding of the EBWM in 1968, led them to a fundamentally different assessment of what the Mujib government represented and what it would do.

The PBSP's class analysis of the Awami League government was as follows. The Awami League represented primarily the interests of three class fractions: the Bengali merchant and commercial class, the petty bourgeoisie of educated professionals (lawyers, teachers, doctors, journalists), and the rural middle peasantry. These class fractions had a genuine interest in national independence from Pakistan, which had subordinated their economic and political interests to those of the West Pakistani ruling class. But they did not have an interest in the kind of radical social transformation (land reform, nationalization of major industries, destruction of feudal relations) that would genuinely serve the interests of the working class and landless peasantry.

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The Awami League government's actual policies in the first years of independence appeared to the PBSP to confirm this class analysis. The government implemented a land reform that set a ceiling on land holdings but left the bulk of the land distribution system essentially unchanged. It nationalized some major industries and established a state-owned enterprise sector, but the implementation of this nationalization served primarily to create opportunities for the accumulation of wealth by politically connected Awami League figures rather than to genuinely transfer economic power to the working class. The government's economic policies failed to address the fundamental problem of rural poverty that had existed throughout the colonial and Pakistani periods.

The Awami League government also moved decisively to demobilize and disarm the various armed groups that had fought in the liberation war, including the PBSP's armed force. This was, from the government's perspective, a necessary step toward restoring order and establishing the monopoly of legitimate violence that is a basic attribute of statehood. From the PBSP's perspective, it was an attempt to disarm the revolutionary forces and prevent them from challenging the class order that the Awami League government was consolidating.

The theoretical framework through which the PBSP analyzed the post-independence Awami League government drew on Mao Zedong's concept of the "comprador bourgeoisie," the section of the local capitalist class that serves primarily as an intermediary for foreign capital rather than engaging in independent productive activity. The PBSP characterized the Awami League government as a comprador government because of its dependence on Indian political and economic support, its accommodation to the interests of international capital, and its failure to genuinely break with the class structures of colonial and Pakistani domination.

This comprador characterization was, in some respects, an analytical overreach. The Awami League government of 1972 to 1975 had genuine nationalist credentials and was not simply a puppet of Indian or international capital in any straightforward sense. It was pursuing policies that were, in significant ways, genuinely oriented toward Bengali national development rather than simply serving as a conduit for foreign exploitation. The nationalization programme, whatever its implementation failures, represented a genuine attempt to build a national economic capacity. The government's foreign policy, while maintaining close relations with India and the Soviet Union, also pursued membership in the Non-Aligned Movement and sought to assert Bangladesh's independence as a nation-state.

At the same time, the PBSP's analysis of the class character and class interests of the Awami League government captured something real about the limitations of what a government of this character would do and the interests it would genuinely serve. The subsequent history of the Awami League in power, including not only Mujib's government of 1972 to 1975 but also the later Awami League governments of Sheikh Hasina that finally ended in the July 2024 uprising, has provided considerable evidence for the proposition that the Awami League represents primarily the interests of a specific class fraction and that its policies consistently prioritize those interests over the interests of the working class and the rural poor.

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9.3 The Theoretical Problem of the "Second Revolution": Continuity and Transformation

The political strategy that Sikder and the PBSP pursued after independence can be understood as an application of what might be called the "theory of the second revolution." This theory, which has parallels in the experience of revolutionary movements in other contexts (China, Cuba, Vietnam, Mozambique, Zimbabwe), holds that national independence from colonial or foreign rule does not by itself achieve the goals of social revolution, and that the revolutionary movement must continue its struggle after independence to ensure that the social transformation accompanying political independence is genuinely serving the interests of the working class and the poor.

The most sophisticated Marxist theorization of this problem was provided by Mao Zedong in his concept of "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat," which he developed in the 1960s partly as a response to what he saw as the restoration of capitalist economic relations in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. Mao's argument was that the achievement of state power by a communist party did not guarantee that socialist construction would proceed, that the class struggle continued even after the revolution and could produce a "revisionist" (capitalist-oriented) degeneration of the revolutionary state if the revolutionary forces did not maintain constant vigilance and struggle against tendencies toward capitalist restoration.

In the East Bengali context, the problem was somewhat different because it was not a communist party but a nationalist party (the Awami League) that had come to power through independence. The PBSP's argument was that the Awami League, as a party of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, would inevitably pursue policies serving those classes' interests rather than the interests of the working class and peasantry, and that the revolutionary movement therefore had to continue its struggle against the Awami League government rather than subordinating itself to national unity under Awami League leadership.

This position was theoretically coherent, but it required the PBSP to engage in armed struggle against a government that commanded genuine popular support, at least in the immediate post-independence period. This was an enormously difficult political and moral challenge. The PBSP was not a large or well-organized force. Its armed cadres numbered in the hundreds rather than the thousands. The Awami League government had the support of the overwhelming majority of the population, the backing of India, and the international legitimacy that accompanied recognition as the government of an independent state that had just emerged from a liberation war.

To launch armed struggle against this government was to risk appearing not as a revolutionary movement fighting for the interests of the poor, but as a destructive force undermining the fragile independence that the Bangladeshi people had just achieved at such enormous cost. This appearance was not simply false, the PBSP's goals were genuinely oriented toward the interests of the poor, but it was the impression that many people, including many who sympathized with left politics, had of the Sarbahara Party's activities in the period from 1972 to 1975.

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9.4 The Geographical Dimension: Protracted People's War in the Bengali Delta

One of the most important and consistently underanalyzed dimensions of the PBSP's revolutionary strategy is its geographical dimension: the specific attempt to apply Mao's strategy of protracted people's war, which was developed in the context of China's vast continental geography, to the conditions of the Bengal delta.

Mao's strategy of protracted people's war was explicitly designed for the specific geographical conditions of China. The key strategic concept was the establishment of rural base areas: liberated zones under the military and political control of the Communist Party, from which the party could build its forces, conduct guerrilla operations against the enemy, and gradually expand until it controlled enough of the countryside to encircle and ultimately capture the cities. The establishment of these base areas required terrain that was difficult for the enemy to control: mountains, forests, remote valleys where a small force with local knowledge and support could resist a larger and better-equipped enemy.

East Bengal, the flat river delta of one of the most densely populated regions of the earth, has none of this terrain. There are no mountains, no significant forest areas outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts, no remote valleys. Every part of the delta is penetrated by rivers and roads. Population density is extremely high, which means that any armed group operating in a rural area is surrounded by civilians who are potential informers. The waterways, which in Mao's China would have provided natural barriers against government forces, in East Bengal also provide government forces with rapid communication and transport routes.

Sikder was aware of these geographical limitations and attempted to address them in his theoretical writings and organizational planning. His approach was to emphasize the use of the river network itself as a zone of guerrilla operations, to use the mobility and concealment advantages of small boats in the delta's waterways, and to focus on the southern delta (Barisal, Jhalokati, Pirojpur, Patuakhali) where the network of rivers and canals was densest and where the government's military presence was relatively thin.

This geographical adaptation of Mao's strategy was creative but ultimately insufficient. The flat, densely populated terrain of the delta made it very difficult for the PBSP to establish the kind of stable base areas that Mao's strategy required. Government forces could move rapidly through the river network to respond to guerrilla attacks. The population, however sympathetic individual peasants might be to the PBSP's programme, lived in conditions of extreme vulnerability to government reprisals that made it dangerous to support an armed movement openly. And the social structure of the delta, with its complex networks of patron-client relations between landlords, political leaders, and peasants, made it difficult for an outsider organization with primarily urban educated cadres to quickly build the kind of dense local political networks that effective guerrilla operations require.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts represented a different geographical possibility, and Sikder had explored it even before the founding of the EBWM, attempting to establish contacts with the

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tribal peoples of the CHT for potential guerrilla base development. The CHT, with its forested hills and its non-Bengali indigenous population (the Jumma people), offered terrain that was much more conducive to Mao's strategy. But the CHT also presented different problems: the cultural and linguistic distance between the Bengali PBSP cadres and the indigenous Jumma population, the complex political situation of the CHT (where the Jumma people had their own distinct aspirations for autonomy), and the logistical difficulty of maintaining a base there in connection with the political work in the delta region.

This geographical analysis suggests that one of the fundamental challenges of the Sarbahara Party's revolutionary project was a structural one: the geographical conditions of East Bengal did not favor the specific revolutionary strategy that Sikder had adopted from the Chinese model, and no amount of organizational creativity or theoretical sophistication could fully overcome this structural constraint.

CHAPTER TEN: THE FIRST CONGRESS OF THE SARBAHARA PARTY AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY LINE (1972 TO 1973)

10.1 The First Party Congress: January 1972

The first formal congress of the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party was held on January 14, 1972, less than a month after Bangladesh's independence. At this congress, Siraj Sikder was elected president of the party. The congress was a significant organizational event: it formally constituted the party as a functioning organization with elected leadership, reviewed the experience of the liberation war period, and established the political line for the coming period.

The timing of the first congress, in the immediate aftermath of independence, reflected the PBSP's determination to move quickly from the liberation war phase to the next phase of the revolutionary struggle. There was no period of consolidation, no pause to assess the new political situation, no tactical accommodation to the national euphoria of the independence moment. The party's line, as established at the first congress, was a continuation and development of the line that had governed the liberation war period: the struggle against imperialism, Indian expansionism, and the comprador Awami League government.

This line was, from one perspective, principled and theoretically consistent. The PBSP had always maintained that national independence under Awami League leadership would not represent genuine liberation for the working class and peasantry, and the conditions of January 1972 gave no reason to revise this assessment. From another perspective, however, the immediate pivot from anti-Pakistan struggle to anti-Awami League struggle was politically dangerous and tactically premature. The PBSP's armed cadres were exhausted from nine months of guerrilla warfare. The party's organizational base in the countryside was shallow. The political conditions for a frontal challenge to the Awami League government were far from ripe.

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The theoretical framework that governed the PBSP's assessment of the post-independence situation reflected an analytical problem that is common in revolutionary movements: the tendency to identify the correct general analysis (that the Awami League government represented bourgeois class interests rather than the interests of the working class and peasantry) with a specific tactical conclusion (that armed struggle against the government must begin immediately) without adequately assessing whether the objective conditions existed for this tactic to succeed.

Revolutionary theory, including Mao's own writings on military strategy, places enormous emphasis on the correct assessment of the balance of forces before engaging in military action. The famous principle that one should "not fight unless one is sure of winning" reflects not a counsel of excessive caution but a recognition that premature military action by a weak force against a strong enemy not only fails militarily but damages the revolutionary movement politically by demonstrating its weakness and exposing its supporters to reprisals. The PBSP's rush to armed struggle against the Awami League government in 1972 arguably violated this principle.

10.2 The Theoretical Documents of 1972: "Exposure of the Draft Strategy and Program"

Among the most important of Sikder's theoretical writings from the post-independence period is the April 1972 document titled "Exposure of the Draft Strategy and Program of the So-Called East Bengal Communist Party." This document, directed against a rival Maoist organization, is significant not only for what it says about the target organization but for what it reveals about Sikder's own theoretical positions and the way in which he understood the political situation of Bangladesh in 1972.

The document is a polemic, and like all polemics it needs to be read with awareness of its argumentative purpose. Sikder is not trying to give a balanced assessment of the East Bengal Communist Party (the organization he is criticizing); he is trying to demonstrate its political errors and theoretical inadequacies in order to consolidate the PBSP's position as the authentic Maoist organization in Bangladesh. But polemics, precisely because they engage so directly with contested theoretical and political questions, are often the most revealing documents for understanding the theoretical positions of their authors.

The central theoretical argument of the "Exposure" document concerns the class character of the 1971 liberation war and the nature of the independent Bangladesh state that emerged from it. Sikder argues that the liberation war, despite its genuinely anti-colonial character as a struggle against Pakistani occupation, was ultimately led by and served the interests of the Bengali bourgeoisie under Awami League leadership. The independent Bangladesh state, therefore, is a state of the comprador bourgeoisie and the landlord class, not a people's democratic state. The task of the revolutionary movement is to overthrow this state through armed revolution, not to find accommodation with it or to work within its legal and political framework.

This theoretical position required Sikder to navigate a difficult argument about the relationship between the genuine national liberation dimension of the 1971 war (which he acknowledged)

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and its class character (which he argued was bourgeois). His solution was to maintain that the two dimensions are analytically distinct: the war was genuinely a liberation war against Pakistani colonialism (and the PBSP had participated in it as such), but the class leadership of the war was bourgeois (the Awami League), and the class beneficiaries of the independence that emerged from the war were primarily the Bengali bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie rather than the working class and peasantry. The revolution's anti-colonial dimension had been achieved; its anti-feudal and anti-comprador dimensions remained unresolved and constituted the continuing task of the revolutionary movement.

This analytical framework had significant merits. It allowed the PBSP to recognize the genuine achievement of national independence without falling into uncritical celebration of the Awami League government. It maintained the distinction between formal political independence and genuine social liberation that is crucial for any serious class analysis of postcolonial states. And it provided a clear programmatic direction for the continuing revolutionary struggle.

10.3 Competing Maoist Organizations: The Complex Landscape of Bangladeshi Left Politics

The "Exposure" document's polemic against the "So-Called East Bengal Communist Party" points to an important dimension of the PBSP's political situation that needs to be examined: the complex and fragmented landscape of Bangladeshi Maoist and left politics in the period from 1972 to 1975.

The PBSP was not the only organization claiming to represent Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought in Bangladesh. There were multiple factions and organizations, all descended from the various splits and realignments within the East Pakistani communist movement of the 1960s, each claiming to be the authentic Maoist party and each differing from the others on specific theoretical and tactical questions. This fragmentation was not merely a product of personal rivalries or organizational ego, though these factors certainly played a role. It reflected genuine theoretical disagreements about the class character of the liberation war, the nature of the post-independence state, the appropriate revolutionary strategy for Bangladeshi conditions, and the organizational model for the communist party.

The major competing organizations included the Huq-Toha group (named after its leaders Mohammad Toaha and Kazi Zahirul Huq), the East Bengal Communist Party of various factions, and several other smaller organizations. Each of these organizations had its own position on the key theoretical questions of the period, and the PBSP's polemical writings against them provide a detailed and sometimes illuminating map of the theoretical terrain of Bangladeshi Maoism in the early 1970s.

The relationship between the PBSP and these competing organizations was not merely polemical. It also had a practical dimension: competition for cadres, for resources, and for political influence in the specific localities where each organization was attempting to build its base. This competition could and sometimes did turn violent, with cadres of one organization

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attacked or killed by cadres of another. The phenomenon of violence between competing revolutionary organizations, which has been documented in the history of revolutionary movements from the early Soviet period through the experience of the Latin American left in the 1970s and the experience of various Maoist organizations in South Asia, represents one of the most tragic and self-destructive aspects of radical left politics.

For the PBSP, the competition with other Maoist organizations created a second front of political struggle alongside the primary struggle against the Awami League government and its security forces. This double burden, fighting both the state and rival revolutionary organizations simultaneously, was a significant drain on the party's organizational resources and a source of political confusion among the broader left sympathizers whom the PBSP sought to recruit.

Sikder's theoretical writings on the competing organizations, particularly the document "The Difference of the Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse-tung Thought Follower Proletarian Revolutionaries of East Bengal with the Huq-Toha Neo-Revisionists," are detailed polemics that engage at length with specific theoretical disagreements. The document accuses the Huq-Toha group of "neo-revisionism," a term that in Maoist political vocabulary meant the systematic modification of revolutionary theory in directions that accommodated the existing social order rather than challenging it. The specific charges include the Huq-Toha group's alleged accommodation to Indian expansionism, its failure to maintain the correct class line in relation to the Awami League government, and its organizational errors.

These theoretical polemics served multiple functions. They were genuinely attempts to clarify theoretical questions that had real implications for revolutionary strategy. They were also instruments of political differentiation, ways of marking the PBSP's distinctive identity in a crowded field of organizations all claiming similar theoretical credentials. And they were instruments of organizational consolidation, ways of maintaining the theoretical discipline and political loyalty of the PBSP's own cadres by clearly defining the boundaries of the correct line and the errors of competing organizations.

10.4 The Founding of the National Liberation Front: April 1973

In April 1973, Siraj Sikder announced the formation of the Purba Banglar Jatiya Mukti Front, the National Liberation Front of East Bengal (hereafter NLFEB), an attempt to create a broader political coalition that would support the PBSP's revolutionary programme while incorporating other organizations and political tendencies. The NLFEB ultimately comprised eleven mass organizations alongside the PBSP itself as the leading party.

The formation of the NLFEB reflected an attempt to apply, at the level of the post-independence political situation, the Maoist theory of the united front. Mao's united front theory, developed in the context of the Chinese revolution, held that the communist party must not simply lead the class struggle of the proletariat in isolation but must build the broadest possible political alliance against the principal enemy, bringing together all classes and forces that could be united against that enemy even if they had different long-term political interests. In the Chinese context, this

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meant building a united front against Japanese imperialism and then, in the civil war period, against the Kuomintang, incorporating not only workers and peasants but also sections of the national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

In the PBSP's post-independence context, the NLFEB was intended to be a united front against the Awami League government and its principal supporters (Indian expansionism and international imperialism). Its eleven constituent mass organizations included student organizations, labor unions, and peasant associations that the PBSP either controlled or significantly influenced. The formation of the NLFEB was simultaneously a demonstration of the PBSP's organizational capacity (it could mobilize eleven organizations into a formal front) and an acknowledgment of its limitations (it needed to build a broader coalition rather than operating purely as a single-party movement).

The NLFEB's declaration of war against the Bangladeshi government was announced with the formation of the front. This declaration formally committed the PBSP and its allied organizations to a programme of armed struggle against the Mujib government, escalating beyond the guerrilla actions that the PBSP had been conducting since independence. The declaration was a significant political escalation that narrowed the PBSP's strategic options and committed it to a course of action whose military and political consequences would unfold over the following two years.

10.5 The Class Struggle in the Countryside: Land, Debt, and Revolutionary Organization

The PBSP's actual organizational work in the period from 1972 to 1973 was concentrated primarily in the rural areas of the southern delta, where the party's liberation war base areas had been established. The specific social conditions of these areas, characterized by extreme land concentration, heavy indebtedness among the peasantry, and the prevalence of various forms of semi-feudal exploitation, were the material basis for the PBSP's political work.

The most exploitative practices that the PBSP's rural work targeted were the usurious lending practices of rural moneylenders (mahajans), who lent to poor peasants at extremely high interest rates and who, when peasants defaulted on their loans (which was very common given the precariousness of agricultural life in the delta), could seize their land or their labor. This system of debt bondage had deep historical roots in Bengali rural society, and it had been not merely unaffected but in some ways intensified by the chaos of the liberation war, during which many poor peasants had taken on additional debt to survive.

The PBSP's response to this system combined political organization with direct action. Cadres were deployed to organize poor peasants and landless laborers into village-level committees, to challenge the power of landlords and moneylenders, to defend peasants who were being evicted for failure to repay debts, and to redistribute illegally held land. These activities combined the legal (organizing petitions and demonstrations) with the illegal (direct seizure of land, destruction of debt records, physical threats or violence against particularly exploitative landlords and moneylenders).

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The theoretical framework for these activities drew on Mao's writings on the peasant movement, particularly the famous "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (1927), in which Mao had celebrated the "revolutionary terrorism" of the Hunan peasant associations against landlords and local strongmen as a necessary and positive feature of agrarian revolution. Mao's argument was that the poor peasants, who had been subject to centuries of exploitation and degradation, needed to demonstrate through collective action against their oppressors that the old social hierarchy was finished, and that this demonstration inevitably involved a degree of violence that liberal critics would find excessive but that was historically necessary for the liberation of the peasantry.

This Maoist celebration of peasant violence against landlords was the theoretical justification for the PBSP's more violent actions in the countryside. Whether this justification was adequate, whether the analogy between the conditions of Hunan in 1927 and the conditions of the Barisal delta in 1972 was close enough to sustain the same theoretical conclusions, is a question that requires careful analysis.

The conditions were similar in some important respects. The exploitation of the peasantry by landlords and moneylenders was real, severe, and systematic. The legal and political system offered no adequate redress to the poor. The organizations that claimed to represent the poor (the Awami League and its associated peasant organizations) were demonstrably serving the interests of the rural middle class rather than the landless and near-landless poor. In these conditions, the PBSP's willingness to challenge the power of landlords and moneylenders through direct action had a genuine political appeal to the most exploited sections of the rural population.

But the conditions were also different in important respects. The Hunan peasant movement of 1927 was a genuinely mass movement, a spontaneous uprising of millions of peasants that the Communist Party was seeking to lead and channel rather than initiate. The PBSP's rural actions were primarily initiated by the party's cadres, a small group of urban-educated young people who were operating in an unfamiliar rural environment. The risk of substituting the party's will for the will of the masses, of doing things in the name of the peasantry that the peasantry itself had not chosen to do, was very real.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: WAR AGAINST THE MUJIB GOVERNMENT: THE LOGIC, TACTICS, AND CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINUED REVOLUTION

11.1 The Escalation of Armed Struggle: 1972 to 1974

The period from 1972 to 1974 saw the gradual escalation of the PBSP's armed campaign against the Bangladeshi government and its associated class enemies. The party's armed cadres conducted operations that included attacks on police stations, the killing of individuals identified as class enemies (landlords, moneylenders, Awami League operatives who were exploiting the local population), and acts of political sabotage. The PBSP's armed operations were concentrated

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primarily in the southern delta districts of Barisal, Jhalokati, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, and Bhola, where the party's base of organizational work was strongest.

The strategic logic of the PBSP's armed campaign was the classical Maoist logic of protracted people's war: through sustained guerrilla action, demonstrate the vulnerability of the state apparatus and the weakness of the comprador government, build the political consciousness and organizational capacity of the poor peasantry, gradually expand the base areas under the party's effective political control, and eventually develop the strength for decisive military action.

The practical realities of the campaign were very different from this strategic blueprint. The PBSP's armed cadres were small in number, poorly equipped by comparison with government security forces, and operating in terrain that, as we have analyzed above, was structurally unsuited to the protracted people's war strategy. The government's response to the PBSP's activities was to deploy the Rakkhi Bahini (a special paramilitary force created by Mujib's government) and the regular police in intensive counterinsurgency operations in the districts where the PBSP was active.

The Rakkhi Bahini deserves specific attention in this analysis. It was created in 1972 as a special security force under the direct control of the Awami League leadership, outside the regular chain of military and police command. The Rakkhi Bahini was notorious for its brutality: it conducted extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and torture against individuals suspected of connection with the PBSP and other opposition forces. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations documented numerous cases of Rakkhi Bahini abuses during this period.

The Rakkhi Bahini's counterinsurgency tactics, which blurred the line between security operations and political terror, had significant consequences for the PBSP's organizational capacity. Many of the party's cadres were killed or captured in Rakkhi Bahini operations. The climate of fear created by the Rakkhi Bahini's activities made it difficult for the PBSP to recruit new members or to maintain the open political work among the peasantry that the party's strategy required. The rural populations that the PBSP sought to organize were caught between two armed forces, the PBSP's guerrillas on one side and the Rakkhi Bahini on the other, and the natural human response to this dangerous position was to try to stay out of the conflict rather than commit to either side.

The jurisprudential dimension of the Rakkhi Bahini's activities is important. The creation of a special security force outside the regular law enforcement structure, accountable directly to the ruling party rather than to independent legal institutions, represented a significant departure from the constitutional and legal principles that had been affirmed in the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh. Article 31 of the Constitution guaranteed the right to life and personal liberty. Article 33 prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention. The Rakkhi Bahini's conduct systematically violated these constitutional guarantees, and the impunity with which it operated demonstrated the gap between constitutional principle and political reality in the early years of Bangladeshi independence.

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This jurisprudential gap between constitutional promise and political practice is one of the central themes of the political history of Bangladesh in the 1970s and beyond. It is a gap that Sikder had always predicted would characterize the Awami League government, whose formal commitment to democratic constitutional principles would be overridden whenever those principles conflicted with the government's interests in suppressing political opposition. The reality of Rakkhi Bahini operations appeared to confirm this prediction, but it was a confirmation that came at enormous cost to the PBSP's organizational capacity and to the lives of its cadres and sympathizers.

11.2 The Great Famine of 1974: Political Economy of Catastrophe

The Bangladesh famine of 1974, which killed hundreds of thousands of people (estimates range from 27,000 to over 1,000,000 deaths) and which produced scenes of mass starvation in the streets of Dhaka and other cities, was one of the most catastrophic events in the early history of independent Bangladesh. Its political and economic dimensions are deeply relevant to understanding the conditions in which the PBSP was operating and the validity of its analysis of the Awami League government.

The 1974 famine has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis. Amartya Sen, in his foundational work on the political economy of famines (developed most fully in "Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation," 1981), argued that famines in the modern era are almost never caused by absolute food shortages but by failures of entitlement: situations in which specific categories of people lose the purchasing power or the social claims necessary to access the food that exists in the economy. In the case of the 1974 Bangladesh famine, Sen argued that the crisis was produced not by a genuine shortage of food at the national level but by a combination of factors that destroyed the entitlements of the rural poor: flooding that damaged the rice crop in some areas, speculation in grain markets by merchants who anticipated shortages and drove up prices, government mismanagement of food distribution, and the political prioritization of the interests of urban elites over the rural poor.

The PBSP's analysis of the 1974 famine, though it was developed before Sen's formal academic framework, reached similar conclusions by a different theoretical route. The party argued that the famine was not a natural disaster but a social disaster, produced by the class structure and political economy of the Awami League's Bangladesh. The grain merchants who speculated during the crisis were the comprador bourgeoisie whose interests the Awami League served. The government's failure to intervene effectively to protect the poor from starvation demonstrated the class character of the Awami League government, its fundamental indifference to the interests of the poor in the face of the interests of the propertied classes.

This analysis was not wrong as far as it went. The 1974 famine did reveal the failure of the Awami League government to protect its most vulnerable citizens, and the political-economic analysis of this failure is largely consistent with both Sen's entitlement framework and the PBSP's class analysis. But the PBSP's analysis was also incomplete. The famine had multiple causes, including the devastating floods of 1974, the global food price crisis following the 1973

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oil shock, and the disruption of Bangladesh's trade relations that resulted from the US government's decision to block food aid in response to Bangladesh's sale of jute to Cuba.

The US decision to block food aid to Bangladesh during the 1974 famine, because Bangladesh had traded with Cuba in violation of US policy, is one of the most disturbing episodes in the history of American foreign policy in South Asia. It meant, in practical terms, that the US government allowed hundreds of thousands of people to starve in order to punish the Bangladeshi government for an act of economic sovereignty. This episode illustrates, with horrifying clarity, the reality of the imperialist power structure that the PBSP's theoretical framework analyzed. The world's richest and most powerful nation was willing to use starvation as a political weapon against one of the world's poorest countries.

From the PBSP's perspective, the 1974 famine demonstrated both the validity of its analysis of imperialist power and the inadequacy of the Awami League government's ability to protect Bangladesh from imperialist pressure. But the PBSP did not have a clear practical programme for what it would have done differently in the famine conditions. The proposition that a revolutionary government would have handled the famine better was theoretically plausible but practically difficult to demonstrate.

11.3 The Introduction of BAKSAL and the Authoritarian Turn

The political crisis produced by the combination of the 1974 famine, the PBSP's armed campaign, and various other sources of instability led Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to make a radical constitutional change in January 1975. On January 25, 1975, Mujib amended the constitution to establish a presidential system with Mujib as president and to create a single-party state under the banner of the Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BAKSAL, the Bangladesh Peasants Workers Awami League), abolishing all other political parties.

The introduction of BAKSAL was a dramatic authoritarian turn that has been extensively analyzed by historians and political scientists. The specific context in which it occurred, including the economic crisis of the famine period, the security threat from the PBSP and other armed opposition groups, and the political crisis within the Awami League itself, explains the timing and character of the decision, even if it does not justify it.

From the PBSP's perspective, the introduction of BAKSAL was a confirmation of its analysis: the Awami League government was moving toward outright authoritarianism because it could not maintain its class rule through democratic means. The abolition of political parties was precisely the kind of fascist turn that the PBSP had predicted the comprador bourgeoisie would make when its interests were seriously threatened.

This characterization was partially valid. The introduction of BAKSAL did represent a serious departure from democratic constitutional principles and a significant concentration of political power in the hands of Mujib and the Awami League leadership. The abolition of opposition parties, including the legitimate left parties that were operating within the constitutional

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framework, was an authoritarian act that cannot be defended on any reasonable constitutional or democratic theory.

At the same time, the complexity of the situation needs to be acknowledged. Mujib's government was facing simultaneous crises from multiple directions: economic collapse, famine, armed insurgency from the PBSP and other groups, and significant internal divisions within the Awami League. The decision to move to a single-party presidential system can be analyzed as a desperate attempt to create political stability and concentrate administrative capacity at a moment of systemic crisis, even if the means chosen were deeply wrong.

The jurisprudential analysis of the BAKSAL constitution is significant. The 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh had been a relatively progressive document, affirming fundamental rights, establishing parliamentary democracy, and creating an independent judiciary. The January 1975 amendments fundamentally altered this constitutional framework, concentrating executive power in the presidency, eliminating judicial review of certain categories of government action, and creating the legal basis for the abolition of political parties. These amendments were constitutionally formal but democratically illegitimate, in the sense that they were made by a government that had achieved its parliamentary majority under the 1972 constitution and was now using that majority to abolish the democratic system through which it had been elected.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS, PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS, AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

12.1 Siraj Sikder and the Philosophy of Revolutionary Practice

The preceding chapters have traced the historical narrative of Siraj Sikder's revolutionary project from the liberation war of 1971 through the founding of the Sarbahara Party and the first years of its struggle against the Mujib government. In this concluding chapter of Part Two, we step back from the historical narrative to examine the broader theoretical, philosophical, and jurisprudential dimensions of Sikder's project in relation to contemporary scholarly debates and to the questions that his legacy continues to raise for students and scholars of political theory, revolutionary history, and South Asian studies.

The central philosophical question raised by Sikder's life and work is the question of the relationship between theory and practice in revolutionary politics. This question, which has occupied political philosophers from Plato's philosopher-kings through Marx's dictum that philosophers have only interpreted the world while the point is to change it, takes on a specific and acute form in the context of revolutionary Marxism. For Sikder, as for Lenin and Mao before him, the theory-practice relationship was not an abstract philosophical puzzle but a concrete practical challenge: how does a revolutionary organization translate its theoretical understanding of social reality into effective political and organizational action?

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The Maoist tradition's answer to this question, encapsulated in the concept of the mass line, is philosophically sophisticated. It avoids both the idealist trap of treating theory as a self-sufficient guide to action and the empiricist trap of treating practice as sufficient without theoretical orientation. The mass line insists on a constant dialectical relationship between theory and practice, between the party's theoretical knowledge and its practical engagement with the masses, in which each transforms the other. Theory informs and organizes practice, and the experience of practice tests, challenges, and enriches theory.

Applying this philosophical framework to the assessment of Sikder's revolutionary project requires asking whether the PBSP genuinely implemented the mass line in this philosophical sense, whether it maintained the constant dialectical engagement between theory and practice that the concept requires, or whether it fell into one of the two errors that the mass line is designed to prevent: either the error of theoretical dogmatism (applying theoretical formulas mechanically without genuine engagement with specific conditions) or the error of empiricist tailism (following the immediate impulses of popular consciousness without providing theoretical leadership).

The honest assessment, supported by the historical evidence, is that the PBSP under Sikder's leadership was more often guilty of theoretical dogmatism than of empiricist tailism. The application of Mao's strategy of protracted people's war to the geographical and social conditions of the Bengal delta, which we analyzed in Chapter Nine, showed a tendency to apply theoretical models derived from a very different context without adequate attention to the specific ways in which Bengali conditions differed from the Chinese conditions for which the model was developed. Similarly, the immediate pivot to armed struggle against the Awami League government after independence, before adequate political groundwork had been laid and without an accurate assessment of the balance of forces, reflected the application of a theoretical line (the theory of continuing revolution against the comprador bourgeoisie) without adequate practical assessment of whether the conditions for effective implementation of that line existed.

12.2 The Jurisprudence of Revolutionary Legitimacy

One of the most profound jurisprudential questions raised by Sikder's project concerns the nature of political legitimacy under conditions of systematic injustice. When a state exercises power in ways that systematically exploit and oppress specific classes or groups within the population, what is the legitimacy of armed resistance against that state? Under what conditions, if any, is political violence against an unjust state legally and morally justified?

These questions have deep roots in the Western political and legal tradition. The natural law tradition, from Aquinas through Suarez and Vitoria to Grotius and Locke, developed theories of the conditions under which subjects have the right to resist illegitimate authority. Locke's theory of revolution, developed in the Second Treatise of Government (1690), holds that government power is legitimate only insofar as it genuinely serves the interests of the people, and that when government systematically violates the fundamental rights of the people, the people have not merely the right but the duty to resist and to replace the government. This Lockean right of

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revolution was incorporated into the founding documents of American democracy (the Declaration of Independence's "right of revolution") and has been a persistent element of liberal democratic political theory.

The Marxist tradition develops a different but related theory of political legitimacy. For Marxists, the legitimacy of political authority is not based on the consent of the governed in the abstract but on the class character of the state: a state that serves the interests of an exploiting class against the interests of the exploited has no genuine legitimacy in the eyes of the exploited, whatever formal democratic procedures may be in place. The proletarian revolution, from this perspective, is not a violation of legitimate authority but the replacement of the illegitimate rule of one class with the genuinely legitimate authority of the class that represents the interests of the great majority.

Sikder's jurisprudence of revolutionary legitimacy drew on both of these traditions but was primarily anchored in the Marxist framework. His argument was that the Awami League government had no genuine legitimacy from the perspective of the working class and peasantry because it represented and served the interests of the comprador bourgeoisie and landlord class. The PBSP's armed struggle against this government was therefore not rebellion against legitimate authority but the exercise of the revolutionary right of the oppressed against their oppressors.

The problem with this jurisprudential framework, from the perspective of contemporary legal and political philosophy, is that it collapses the distinction between political legitimacy and class interest in a way that makes it very difficult to specify any practical limits on revolutionary violence. If any government that represents class interests other than those of the proletariat lacks legitimacy, and if the proletariat has therefore an unlimited right to resist and overthrow such a government, then the theory provides no basis for the kind of proportionality and discrimination that most moral theories and all serious systems of international humanitarian law require as conditions for the justification of political violence.

The most sophisticated contemporary response to this problem from within the revolutionary Marxist tradition is found in the work of theorists who have attempted to develop a "revolutionary ethics" that incorporates moral constraints on revolutionary violence without abandoning the substantive commitment to radical social transformation. These include the work of Norman Geras on "The Contract of Mutual Indifference" (1998), Slavoj Zizek's controversial analyses of revolutionary violence and ethics in works like "Violence" (2008), and the more recent contributions of Jodi Dean on communist politics and political ethics. Each of these works engages with the genuine moral difficulty of justifying political violence in the pursuit of just social ends, and each ultimately acknowledges that this difficulty cannot be resolved by theoretical fiat but must be confronted through the specific analysis of specific historical circumstances.

For our assessment of Sikder's revolutionary project, the relevant principle is that the justification of political violence requires not only a correct assessment of the injustice of the

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existing order (which the PBSP's analysis largely provided) but also a proportionate relationship between the means of violence employed and the ends sought, and an adequate assessment of whether armed struggle in the specific conditions is likely to advance or retard the movement toward justice. On these criteria, the assessment of the PBSP's armed campaign against the Awami League government is more mixed. The injustice of the Awami League government's policies was real, but whether armed struggle in the specific conditions of 1972 to 1975 was a proportionate and effective response to those injustices is genuinely questionable.

12.3 Postcolonial Theory and the Problem of the Postcolonial State

The theoretical framework of postcolonial studies, which has developed since the 1980s in the work of scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, provides important analytical tools for understanding Sikder's project and its significance.

Postcolonial theory, in its various forms, is concerned with the complex and often contradictory legacies of colonial rule, including the persistence of colonial structures, mentalities, and power relations in the formally postcolonial states that emerged from decolonization. It raises fundamental questions about the nature of the postcolonial state: is it genuinely independent, or does it reproduce colonial power relations in modified form? Who benefits from formal decolonization, and who continues to be exploited despite it? What is the relationship between the political independence of a formerly colonized people and their genuine social, cultural, and economic liberation?

These questions map directly onto the theoretical problems that Sikder was wrestling with in his analysis of the post-independence Bangladeshi state. His argument that the Awami League government represented a form of continued colonial subordination (now to Indian influence rather than Pakistani rule) was an early articulation of what postcolonial theory would later systematize as the critique of the "national bourgeoisie" as the primary beneficiary of formal decolonization.

Frantz Fanon, writing in "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) and in the posthumously published "Towards the African Revolution" (1964), developed the most powerful pre-postcolonial analysis of the ways in which formal decolonization could reproduce rather than transform the structures of colonial exploitation. Fanon argued that the national bourgeoisie that typically led the decolonization movement lacked the economic and cultural independence to genuinely break with the colonial system, and that it would tend to take over the formal structures of the colonial state while continuing to serve as an intermediary for the international (imperialist) economic system. The result was "political independence" that changed the race and nationality of the ruling elite without changing the fundamental structures of exploitation and subordination.

Sikder's analysis of the Awami League government bore striking resemblances to Fanon's analysis of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie, even though Sikder was working primarily within the Maoist theoretical tradition rather than Fanon's more existentialist-influenced

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framework. Both Fanon and Sikder argued that formal national independence could be a form of betrayal of the genuine aspirations of the oppressed, a replacement of one ruling class by another without changing the fundamental structures of power and exploitation. Both argued that genuine liberation required a social revolution that went beyond formal political independence. And both argued that the masses, the workers and peasants who had made the revolutionary struggle possible through their sacrifices, were the primary victims of this betrayal.

The most recent scholarship in postcolonial studies has developed these insights in directions that are relevant for our analysis of Sikder. The work of Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies collective, which emerged from the 1980s and which has continued to develop in various directions into the 2020s, has focused particularly on the problem of subaltern agency: the question of how those who are excluded from formal political structures and from the historical narratives produced by dominant classes have nevertheless been agents in the making of their own history. This work has important implications for the assessment of the PBSP's revolutionary project because it raises the question of whose history is being told and from whose perspective.

The subaltern studies approach applied to the PBSP's history would look beyond the party's leadership and its theoretical documents to the experience of the peasants, landless laborers, and poor urban workers whom the party sought to represent. Did these people experience the PBSP's activities as genuinely representing their interests? Did they participate in the party's political work as active agents in their own liberation, or were they primarily recipients of a revolutionary programme designed and led by educated urban intellectuals? These questions, which the existing historical scholarship has only partially addressed, are crucial for a genuinely subaltern history of the Sarbahara Party.

12.4 The Question of Internal Democracy and Political Violence within the Party

Among the most serious criticisms of Siraj Sikder's leadership of the PBSP is the allegation that he exercised authority in an authoritarian and sometimes violent manner within the party itself. These allegations, which appear in multiple secondary sources and in the memoirs of former party members collected in Mohiuddin Ahmad's "Lal Shontrash," raise fundamental questions about the relationship between the revolutionary aims of the party and its internal organizational practices.

The specific allegations include the following: that Sikder tolerated no serious criticism of his leadership within the party, that party members who raised questions about his decisions or positions risked expulsion or worse, that individuals accused of betrayal or deviation were sometimes subjected to internal "people's tribunals" whose standards of evidence and due process were wholly inadequate, and that in at least some cases individuals were killed on the basis of accusations of betrayal that were not adequately investigated.

These allegations need to be approached with appropriate caution. They come primarily from individuals who were themselves involved in or opposed to the party, and who may have

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personal or political reasons to exaggerate or selectively emphasize certain aspects of the party's internal life. The clandestine nature of the party's operations also means that documentation is sparse and the historical record is necessarily incomplete.

Nevertheless, the specific allegations have a ring of plausibility given what is known about the organizational dynamics of revolutionary parties operating under conditions of severe state repression. The combination of extreme external danger (government counterinsurgency operations that were killing party cadres), organizational secrecy (which prevented open discussion of internal disagreements), strict hierarchical discipline (which was genuinely necessary for security), and the cult of personality that can develop around a charismatic revolutionary leader (Sikder was undoubtedly a charismatic figure who inspired intense personal loyalty among his followers) creates precisely the conditions in which internal authoritarianism can flourish and in which the procedures for handling accusations of betrayal can become grotesquely inadequate.

The philosophical and jurisprudential analysis of this problem connects to one of the deepest questions in political theory: whether a revolutionary organization committed to building a more just and democratic society can maintain genuinely democratic and just internal practices while operating under conditions of existential threat. This is what the political theorist Sheldon Wolin, in his concept of "fugitive democracy" (developed in "Democracy Incorporated," 2008), described as the fundamental tension between the organizational requirements of effective political action and the democratic principles that the organization claims to serve.

The honest historical assessment must acknowledge that the PBSP under Sikder's leadership fell significantly short of its own democratic aspirations in its internal organizational life. The tendency toward authoritarian internal leadership was not merely an accidental feature of specific individuals but was structurally produced by the organizational model and the conditions under which the party operated. This does not excuse specific instances of unjust internal violence, which must be condemned regardless of their political context. But it does situate those instances within a structural analysis that illuminates why they occurred and what they reveal about the limitations of the organizational model.

12.5 Siraj Sikder and the Global Maoist Moment: Comparative Analysis

The period from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s was the high watermark of global Maoism. Maoist revolutionary organizations existed on every inhabited continent, and the specific constellation of ideas associated with Mao Zedong's thought, including the theory of protracted people's war, the mass line, the new democratic revolution, and the critique of Soviet revisionism, inspired revolutionary movements from Peru (the Shining Path, founded in 1980 but with roots in the Maoist student movement of the 1960s and 1970s) through the Philippines (the Communist Party of the Philippines, founded 1968, which has maintained a continuous armed struggle to the present day), Nepal (the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which conducted a protracted people's war from 1996 to 2006 and ultimately won a share of political power through

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negotiated settlement), India (the various Naxalite organizations), and many parts of Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

Comparing the PBSP's experience with these other global Maoist movements provides important analytical perspective. The comparison reveals both what was distinctive about the East Bengali context and what was common across the global Maoist experience.

In terms of distinctiveness, the East Bengali case was shaped by the specific history of the liberation war, which gave the PBSP both an organizational opportunity (the establishment of base areas during the war) and a political challenge (the overwhelming popular legitimacy of the post-independence Awami League government) that had no precise parallel in other Maoist movements. The geographical conditions of the Bengal delta, as we have analyzed, were also distinctive in ways that made the application of Mao's protracted people's war strategy particularly difficult.

In terms of commonalities with other global Maoist movements, the PBSP shared several important features. First, like virtually all Maoist movements of the period, it was founded and led primarily by educated urban intellectuals and students from middle-class backgrounds rather than by workers and peasants. This class character of the revolutionary leadership created persistent tensions between the revolutionary programme (which claimed to represent the interests of workers and peasants) and the actual social composition and cultural orientations of the party's leadership.

Second, like virtually all Maoist movements, the PBSP faced the tension between the organizational requirements of effective clandestine action (strict hierarchical discipline, secrecy, centralized authority) and the democratic principles that it claimed to embody. This tension was universal across global Maoism and produced, in various movements, various degrees of internal authoritarianism.

Third, like most Maoist movements of the period, the PBSP was severely damaged by state counterinsurgency operations, the effectiveness of which demonstrated the difficulty of building a revolutionary military force capable of challenging a modern state's security apparatus through the specific tactics of protracted people's war.

The comparative case that offers perhaps the most instructive parallels with the PBSP's experience is the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), founded by Jose Maria Sison in 1968, the same year as the EBWM. The CPP, like the PBSP, applied Mao's theory of protracted people's war to conditions (the Philippine archipelago) that differed significantly from the Chinese case for which the theory was developed. Like the PBSP, the CPP was founded primarily by educated urban students and intellectuals who sought to organize among the peasantry. And like the PBSP, the CPP experienced significant internal crises, including episodes of internal violence against accused traitors, that revealed the limitations of its organizational model.

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The major difference is that the CPP survived as an organization to the present day, whereas the PBSP was effectively destroyed as a functioning revolutionary organization after Sikder's death in 1975. The CPP's survival is partly attributable to the specific geographical and social conditions of the Philippines, where genuine mountain and forest terrain provided the possibility for the kind of base areas that Mao's strategy required, and partly to the specific political environment of the Philippines, where the Marcos dictatorship (1972 to 1986) provided a clear and unambiguous target for revolutionary opposition that maintained the political coherence and mass base of the revolutionary movement.

12.6 The Legacy of the Early PBSP for Contemporary Bangladeshi Politics: The 2024 Connection

The contemporary relevance of the PBSP's early history has been dramatically demonstrated by the events of July and August 2024, when a mass uprising led primarily by students toppled the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina, which had been in power continuously since 2009. This uprising, which came after years of increasing authoritarianism, electoral manipulation, and political repression by the Hasina government, prompted an outpouring of interest in the history of earlier movements that had challenged Awami League rule, including the PBSP.

The January 2025 fifty-year commemoration of Siraj Sikder's death took place in this context of renewed political consciousness and historical reflection. Events commemorating Sikder's life and thought were held in Dhaka and other cities. Scholarly articles and political essays assessed his legacy. The Jamhoor article cited in the sources for this chapter (published in May 2025) explicitly connected the lessons of Sikder's experience to the challenges facing the post-Hasina political moment, arguing that the July 2024 uprising demonstrated both the potential for mass political action against authoritarian governments and the importance of the questions about political organization and revolutionary strategy that Sikder's life raised.

The specific lessons that the 2024 uprising drew from the Sarbahara Party's history are complex and contested. Some left activists have drawn the lesson that Sikder's insistence on the class character of the Awami League, his refusal to subordinate working-class interests to the political leadership of the bourgeois nationalist movement, was vindicated by the history of the Awami League's progressive authoritarianism, from Mujib's BAKSAL to Hasina's police state. Others have drawn the lesson that the PBSP's armed struggle against the Mujib government was a strategic and moral error that undermined the left's capacity to build the mass political base that it needed, and that the July 2024 uprising demonstrated the power of mass nonviolent resistance (including the willingness of young people to face live ammunition with their bodies) that the PBSP's armed vanguard strategy did not adequately appreciate.

The most thoughtful assessments of this period, like that in the Jamhoor article cited, acknowledge the genuine complexity of both Sikder's historical project and its contemporary lessons. They recognize that Sikder raised real and important questions about the class character of the independence movement and the postcolonial state, while also acknowledging the

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limitations and failures of the specific organizational and strategic choices that the PBSP made. They see in the July 2024 uprising not a simple validation of either the armed vanguard model or the nonviolent mass movement model but a complex political event that demands its own careful analysis rather than being assimilated into any pre-existing theoretical template.

12.7 The Philosophical Question of Political Ethics in Extreme Conditions

The period covered in this Part, 1971 to 1973, was one of the most morally extreme periods imaginable. It began with genocide, the deliberate attempt by the Pakistani military to eliminate the political leadership and cultural capacity of the Bengali people. It included the extraordinary collective courage of the Mukti Bahini fighters and the millions of civilian Bengalis who chose resistance over accommodation. It included the massive international solidarity movement that supported Bangladesh's liberation. And it also included, on the side of the PBSP, acts of political violence that are morally troubling regardless of the political framework in which they were justified.

How should we evaluate these morally troubling acts? The question requires a serious philosophical engagement rather than simple condemnation or simple justification.

The philosophical tradition of consequentialism, in its various forms from Bentham and Mill through contemporary utilitarian ethics, evaluates actions by their consequences: an action is right if it produces better consequences than available alternatives. Applied to the PBSP's actions, a consequentialist assessment would ask whether the armed struggle and class-based violence served to advance the interests of the working class and peasantry, or whether it produced consequences (state repression, organizational destruction, political isolation) that made those interests worse off in the long run. This assessment, as the historical evidence suggests, is likely to conclude that the consequences of the PBSP's armed strategy were on balance negative for the people it sought to represent.

The philosophical tradition of deontological ethics, associated primarily with Kant, evaluates actions by their conformity to universal moral principles regardless of their consequences. A Kantian assessment of the PBSP's killings of landlords and moneylenders qua members of an economic class would condemn them as violations of the categorical imperative, which prohibits treating persons as mere means to ends and requires that our actions be universalizable. The PBSP's internal show trials and summary executions of accused traitors, if the historical allegations are accurate, would also fail the Kantian test.

The virtue ethics tradition, associated with Aristotle and its contemporary revival in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and others, evaluates actions by the character traits they express and cultivate. From this perspective, the question would be what kind of persons the PBSP's revolutionary culture was producing: were its cadres developing the virtues (courage, justice, practical wisdom, solidarity) that a genuinely revolutionary movement requires, or were they developing vices (dogmatism, cruelty, fanaticism, intolerance of dissent) that would ultimately

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undermine both the revolutionary project and the quality of the society that the project aimed to create?

No single philosophical framework provides a complete and satisfactory answer to the moral questions raised by the PBSP's conduct in the period from 1971 to 1973. What the philosophical analysis does is clarify what questions we need to ask and what criteria are relevant for answering them. The honest intellectual engagement with Siraj Sikder's legacy requires precisely this kind of philosophical seriousness: neither the uncritical celebration of everything he did in the name of revolutionary commitment nor the simple condemnation of the violence associated with his movement from a position of comfortable remove.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATIONS AND STATE FORMATION

13.1 The State and Its Revolutionary Challenges: Contemporary Theory

The question of how revolutionary organizations challenge and seek to transform the state is one of the central questions of political theory, and the scholarship of the past decade has produced important new frameworks for understanding it. These frameworks are relevant for our analysis of the PBSP's challenge to the Bangladeshi state in the period from 1972 to 1975.

The work of political theorist Jodi Dean, mentioned earlier, has developed an influential account of what she calls the "communist horizon," the political orientation toward radical social transformation that maintains its force even in conditions where revolutionary victory seems very distant. Dean argues that communist politics requires a form of "partisanship," a deliberate commitment to a specific political position and to the organizational forms that can sustain that commitment over time, rather than the open-ended "deliberative democracy" that liberal political theory tends to favor. From this perspective, the PBSP's organizational discipline and its commitment to a specific theoretical line can be assessed more sympathetically than from a liberal democratic perspective, even if specific applications of that discipline are criticized.

The work of sociologist Georgi Derluguian on revolutionary movements and state power in the postcolonial world provides another relevant framework. Derluguian argues that the relative success or failure of revolutionary movements depends critically on the specific "opportunity structures" that the political environment provides: the specific configuration of state power, class relations, international support, and organizational resources that either facilitates or prevents revolutionary success. Applied to the PBSP, this framework highlights the extremely unfavorable opportunity structure of the immediate post-independence period: a newly formed state with strong popular legitimacy, massive Indian backing, and a functioning (if brutal) security apparatus, confronted by a small, poorly resourced revolutionary organization with a limited mass base.

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The work of Mahmood Mamdani on postcolonial citizenship and political violence, developed most fully in "Citizen and Subject" (1996) and "Define and Rule" (2012), provides important analytical tools for understanding the specific character of the Bangladeshi state that the PBSP sought to challenge. Mamdani argues that the postcolonial state inherited from colonialism a specific structure of "decentralized despotism" in the countryside, combining formal citizenship at the center with the authoritarian rule of local power holders in the rural periphery. This structure, which persisted into the postcolonial era, is precisely the social reality that the PBSP's agrarian work in the Barisal delta was attempting to challenge.

13.2 Gender, Class, and the Revolutionary Movement: An Underexamined Dimension

One dimension of the PBSP's history that deserves more attention than it has typically received in the existing scholarship is the gender dimension: the role of women in the organization, the treatment of gender relations within the party, and the implications of the PBSP's theoretical framework for questions of gender equality and women's liberation.

The existing historical record on this dimension is sparse, which is itself revealing. The secondary sources and memoirs that have been collected on the PBSP's history mention women members only incidentally, and there is very little analysis of the specific experiences of women within the party or of how gender relations functioned in the PBSP's internal culture and organizational work.

What can be said, based on the available evidence, is that the PBSP did include women members, some of whom participated in armed operations. The PBSP's formal programme included commitments to the equality of women, consistent with the Maoist tradition's formal commitment to women's emancipation as part of the revolutionary programme. Mao Zedong's famous dictum that "women hold up half the sky" was a standard element of Maoist political discourse.

But the formal commitment to women's equality in a revolutionary programme does not automatically translate into the practice of gender equality in a revolutionary organization, especially one operating under the extreme conditions of clandestine struggle. The historical evidence from other Maoist revolutionary movements, including the detailed accounts of women's experiences in the Shining Path (Peru), the CPP (Philippines), and the various Indian Naxalite movements, suggests that gender inequality within revolutionary organizations has been a persistent problem, with women often performing domestic and support roles while men dominated military and leadership roles, and with sexual violence and exploitation sometimes occurring within the organizations themselves.

Without detailed historical investigation of the PBSP's specific practices, it would be wrong to assume that it was simply replicating the gender dynamics of the wider society or the worst practices of other Maoist movements. But it would be equally wrong to assume, without evidence, that the formal commitment to gender equality was consistently implemented in practice. The gender dimension of the PBSP's history is an area where further historical research,

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including oral history work with surviving women members and associates of the party, is urgently needed.

13.3 Law, Legitimacy, and the Critique of "Bourgeois Law"

The PBSP's theoretical framework included an extensive critique of what it called "bourgeois law," the legal system of the Bangladeshi state. This critique, derived from the Marxist tradition's analysis of law as an instrument of class rule, has important jurisprudential dimensions that deserve careful examination.

The Marxist theory of law, in its classical formulations, holds that law in capitalist society is not a neutral system of rules impartially applied to all citizens but a mechanism for maintaining and legitimizing the power of the ruling class. This theory has several dimensions. At the most fundamental level, the legal system protects property rights, and in a capitalist society property is concentrated in the hands of the capitalist class: therefore, the legal system primarily serves the interests of the capitalist class. At a more specific level, the criminal law and the security law are used systematically against working-class political activity (strikes, demonstrations, organizing) while protecting capitalist property and authority. And at the level of legal ideology, the language of legal equality before the law conceals the reality of substantive inequality in society, creating the illusion that the legal system is fair and impartial when in fact it systematically advantages the powerful.

This general Marxist analysis of law has been extensively developed in the critical legal studies movement, which emerged in US law schools in the late 1970s and 1980s and produced a sophisticated academic critique of liberal legal theory. Critical legal scholars like Roberto Unger, Duncan Kennedy, and Morton Horwitz argued that legal doctrine is not a coherent, internally consistent system but a set of contradictory principles and values that can be deployed to reach any desired result, and that the apparent neutrality of legal reasoning conceals the political and class interests that actually determine legal outcomes.

The specific critique of Bangladeshi law that the PBSP articulated was more immediately political than academic. The PBSP pointed to the use of emergency powers and security legislation to suppress political opposition, the use of the Rakkhi Bahini as an extrajudicial instrument of political repression, the failure of the courts to protect constitutional rights against government violations, and the specific legal structures (land law, debt law, labor law) that facilitated the exploitation of the poor by landlords, moneylenders, and employers.

These specific criticisms were largely accurate as descriptions of the Bangladeshi legal system in the early 1970s. The gap between constitutional principles and actual legal practice was very wide, and the use of law as an instrument of class power was both systematic and undeniable. The more difficult question, which the PBSP's framework did not adequately address, was what an alternative would look like: if existing "bourgeois law" is an instrument of class domination, what kind of law would a genuinely emancipatory legal system provide?

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The PBSP's answer, in principle, was the law of the People's Democratic Republic that it sought to create. But the specific content of this alternative legal system was not elaborated in any detail in Sikder's theoretical writings. The draft constitution of the PBSP gives broad principles but not specific legal institutions. This lacuna is significant: it suggests that the PBSP's critique of existing law was more fully developed than its positive vision of an alternative legal order.

This problem, of developing a positive vision of emancipatory law alongside the critique of existing law, has been one of the central challenges for Marxist jurisprudence throughout its history. The most sophisticated recent attempts to develop such a vision include the work of theorist Costas Douzinas and Alex Gearty in "The Meaning of Modern Legal Theory" (2005), which argues that a genuinely emancipatory jurisprudence must be grounded in the recognition of human dignity and difference rather than in formal equality before an abstract law. The feminist legal theory of scholars like Martha Fineman and Patricia Williams has also contributed important insights about the limitations of formal equality and the need for a jurisprudence that genuinely addresses structural inequalities.

13.4 The Problem of Revolutionary Authority: Philosophical Analysis

One of the most philosophically profound questions raised by Sikder's leadership of the PBSP is the question of revolutionary authority: on what basis does a revolutionary leader or revolutionary party claim the right to act in the name of the oppressed, and what are the limits of that authority?

This question has been addressed in different ways by different philosophical traditions. The liberal democratic tradition grounds political authority in consent: a leader has authority to act in the name of a group insofar as the members of that group have given their consent, either directly (through voting) or through the structures of representative government. From this perspective, Sikder's claim to speak and act in the name of the working class and peasantry of East Bengal was problematic, since neither the PBSP nor Sikder personally was chosen through any democratic process by the workers and peasants they claimed to represent.

The Leninist tradition grounds revolutionary authority not in formal democratic consent but in the correct theoretical understanding of the objective interests of the working class. Since the working class in conditions of capitalist society does not spontaneously develop accurate consciousness of its own objective interests (this is Lenin's thesis in "What Is to Be Done?"), the authority of the vanguard party to act in the name of the working class is based not on electoral mandate but on the party's claim to embody the working class's "true" interests as understood through Marxist science. This is a philosophically fraught claim: it assumes that there is an objective fact about what the working class's "true" interests are and that the party has accurately identified those interests, assumptions that can be challenged on both epistemological and normative grounds.

The most sophisticated philosophical critique of this Leninist theory of authority is found in the work of Jürgen Habermas, particularly in "The Theory of Communicative Action" (1981).

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Habermas argues that the claim to know another's "true" interests in a way that overrides their expressed preferences is always a form of paternalism and potential domination, and that genuine political authority must be grounded in the practical discourse through which participants reach mutual understanding rather than in the external imposition of a correct theory. From Habermas's perspective, the PBSP's claim to revolutionary authority on the basis of its theoretical correctness was a form of paternalism that violated the communicative conditions for genuine political legitimacy.

Sikder's response to this kind of critique, insofar as it can be reconstructed from his theoretical writings, would likely have been the mass line argument: the party's authority is not based on external imposition but on the constant dialectical relationship between the party's theoretical knowledge and the lived experience and consciousness of the masses. But as we have analyzed, the implementation of the mass line in the conditions of clandestine revolutionary struggle under state repression was necessarily limited, and the gap between the theoretical principle and the organizational reality was significant.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE BROADER POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND INTERCONNECTIONS

14.1 China, the Soviet Union, and the International Communist Movement

The international context of the PBSP's revolutionary project in the period from 1971 to 1973 was shaped decisively by the Sino-Soviet split, the fundamental conflict between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) that had divided the international communist movement in the early 1960s. Understanding this international context is essential for understanding the specific theoretical positions of the PBSP and the political alignments that shaped its organizational development.

The official position of the CPC during the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh was, paradoxically, support for Pakistan rather than for the Bengali liberation movement. This position was driven by Chinese strategic calculations: China regarded India as a regional expansionist power aligned with the Soviet Union, and it therefore supported Pakistan as a counterweight to Indian power in South Asia. The CPC's support for Pakistan meant that the pro-Chinese communist organizations in East Pakistan, including Sikder's EBWM, were in a politically embarrassing position: they were aligned theoretically with the CPC while fighting practically against the Pakistani state that China was supporting.

This contradiction was one of the most difficult aspects of Sikder's political situation during the liberation war. The PBSP's resolution of the contradiction was to maintain its theoretical alignment with the Maoist framework while rejecting the specific Chinese position on Pakistan, arguing that the CPC was making a tactical error based on geopolitical calculations that overrode its principled anti-imperialist position. This was a theoretically defensible position (supporting

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the general framework of Maoist theory while criticizing specific applications), but it required a degree of theoretical independence from the Chinese center of the Maoist movement that was unusual for pro-Chinese communist organizations of the period.

The Soviet Union's position on the Bangladesh liberation war was, from the PBSP's perspective, equally problematic. The Soviet Union supported India's military intervention and therefore indirectly supported the Awami League's independence movement. But the Soviet Union was, in the PBSP's analysis, a "social-imperialist" power, a state that had betrayed socialist principles and was pursuing imperialist great-power politics under the cover of communist ideology. Soviet support for Bangladesh's independence therefore had an ulterior motive: the establishment of a pro-Soviet client state in South Asia that would advance Soviet strategic interests against both China and Pakistan.

This "three enemies" framework, in which the PBSP identified the United States, the Soviet Union, and India as the three major external powers seeking to dominate East Bengal, was theoretically consistent with the Maoist analysis of the international order but created significant practical difficulties. It meant that the PBSP had no major international sponsor and no access to the resources (weapons, training, organizational support) that international sponsors typically provide to revolutionary movements aligned with their interests. The Mukti Bahini had Indian and Soviet support. Other Bangladeshi left organizations had varying degrees of Soviet support. The PBSP had nothing but its own theoretical correctness and organizational resources.

14.2 The Indian Factor: Expansion, Dependency, and Sovereignty

India's role in the creation of Bangladesh was enormous and deeply ambivalent from the PBSP's perspective. India's military intervention in December 1971 was the decisive military factor in Pakistan's defeat. India's support for the Mukti Bahini throughout the liberation war, including training, weapons, and logistical support, was essential for the survival and eventual victory of the liberation movement. And India's diplomatic support for the new state of Bangladesh, including the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace signed between Bangladesh and India in March 1972, provided the international legitimacy that was crucial for Bangladesh's recognition as a new state.

The PBSP's characterization of India as an "expansionist" power, therefore, was politically controversial in the extreme, particularly in the immediate post-independence period when Indian-Bangladeshi relations were warm and Indian support for Bangladesh's liberation was fresh in the public memory. Most Bangladeshis in early 1972 regarded India as a friend and liberator rather than as a threat to Bengali sovereignty. The PBSP's insistence on the Indian expansionist threat seemed, to most people, like sectarian theoretical posturing divorced from political reality.

But the PBSP's concerns about Indian influence over the new Bangladeshi state were not wholly without foundation. The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace of 1972 gave India specific advantages in its relationship with Bangladesh, including provisions for economic and

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military cooperation that created forms of dependency that critics later characterized as compromising Bangladesh's full sovereignty. India's economic interests in Bangladesh's markets and its strategic interest in preventing Bangladesh from becoming a base for Indian opposition groups (particularly the northeast Indian insurgencies that used Bangladesh as a transit route and safe haven) meant that India had specific interests in the domestic politics of Bangladesh that went beyond simple solidarity with a newly independent state.

The broader historical pattern of India's relations with its smaller neighbors, including Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, has sometimes involved pressures and interventions that are hard to characterize as simply respectful of those states' sovereignty. The PBSP's characterization of India as a "regional expansionist power" was exaggerated and politically counterproductive in the specific context of 1972, but the underlying analytical concern about the asymmetrical power relationship between a large and powerful state and its smaller, more vulnerable neighbors contained a genuine insight that subsequent history has not entirely refuted.

14.3 The United States and the Bangladesh Liberation War

The United States government's response to the Bangladesh liberation war is one of the most shameful episodes in American foreign policy history, and it is directly relevant to the PBSP's anti-imperialist analysis. The Nixon administration, guided by Henry Kissinger's "realist" strategic framework, strongly supported Pakistan during the liberation war, continuing arms supplies to the Pakistani military even as evidence of genocide accumulated, using back channels through Pakistan to pursue the opening to China (for which Pakistan was serving as an intermediary), and blocking United Nations Security Council action that might have constrained the Pakistani military's violence.

The specific details of American policy during this period, documented most fully in Srinath Raghavan's "1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh" (2013) and in Archer Blood's "The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh" (2002), are deeply damning. The US Consul General in Dhaka, Archer Blood, sent a famous dissent telegram to Washington (known as the "Blood Telegram") documenting the Pakistani military's atrocities and warning of the genocidal character of Operation Searchlight. The Nixon administration ignored this dissent, and Blood was recalled. The "tilt toward Pakistan" in American policy, as it was characterized in a leaked National Security Council document, meant that the United States was effectively complicit in the genocidal violence of the Pakistani military.

The PBSP's characterization of US imperialism as one of the major external enemies of Bengali liberation was, given this historical record, entirely accurate as a description of American policy during the liberation war. The American government prioritized its strategic relationship with Pakistan and its geopolitical interests in the opening to China over any concern for the rights or lives of the Bengali people.

The subsequent withdrawal of US food aid during the 1974 famine, already analyzed in Chapter Eleven, was another instance of American imperialist power being used against the interests of

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the Bangladeshi people. These specific historical facts provide concrete grounding for the PBSP's more abstract anti-imperialist analysis and illustrate the ways in which the theory of imperialism corresponded to specific, documented historical realities rather than being merely a theoretical abstraction.

14.4 The Naxalite Connection: India, Bengal, and Cross-Border Revolutionary Networks

The relationship between the PBSP and the Naxalite movement in India, particularly the Naxalites of West Bengal, is an important but understudied dimension of the PBSP's history. The Naxalbari uprising of 1967, which gave the Indian Maoist movement its name, occurred in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, a region with strong cultural and political connections to East Bengal. The Naxalite movement that emerged from the 1967 uprising drew on many of the same theoretical sources (Mao's writings on protracted people's war, the Chinese model of agrarian revolution) and reflected many of the same political concerns (the failures of parliamentary communism, the exploitation of the rural poor, the need for armed revolutionary struggle) as the EBWM that Sikder was founding in the same year.

The connections between the PBSP and the West Bengal Naxalite movement were real, though they were complicated by the international boundaries between India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh, by the PBSP's characterization of India as an expansionist power (which sat awkwardly with any claim of solidarity with Indian revolutionaries), and by the significant theoretical and organizational differences between the various currents of the Indian Naxalite movement.

The Naxalite movement in India during the early 1970s was experiencing its own crisis, characterized by increasingly intense state repression (the Indira Gandhi government launched a systematic crackdown on the Naxalites in 1970 and 1971, killing hundreds of activists and imprisoning thousands more) and by severe internal fragmentation and inter-organizational violence. The comparison between the PBSP's experience and the Indian Naxalite experience during this period reveals striking parallels: both movements were facing state counterinsurgency operations that were severely damaging their organizational capacity, both were experiencing internal fragmentation and sometimes violent conflict between competing organizations, and both were confronting the gap between their theoretical aspirations and their actual organizational reach.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF KEY EVENTS IN PART TWO

1969: Mass uprising (Gono Obbhuthan) in East Pakistan; fall of Ayub Khan

March 25 to 26, 1971: Operation Searchlight; Pakistani military launches genocidal assault

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April 30, 1971: Sikder forms the Purba Banglar Sashastra Dheshapremik Bahini (Armed Patriotic Force of East Bengal) at Swarupkathi, Barisal

June 3, 1971: Sikder founds the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party (PBSP) at Peyarabagan, Barisal district

September 1971: Sikder writes the draft constitution of the PBSP

December 16, 1971: Pakistan's military surrender; Bangladesh achieves independence

January 10, 1972: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returns to Dhaka; becomes prime minister of Bangladesh

January 14, 1972: First congress of the PBSP; Sikder elected president

March 1972: Bangladesh-India Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace

April 1972: Sikder writes "Exposure of the Draft Strategy and Program of the So-Called East Bengal Communist Party"

1972 to 1973: PBSP conducts armed operations against government forces and class enemies in the Barisal region and beyond

April 1973: Formation of the Purba Banglar Jatiya Mukti Front (National Liberation Front of East Bengal) under Sikder's presidency

1974: Great Bangladesh famine; hundreds of thousands of deaths

January 25, 1975: Mujib introduces BAKSAL; single-party presidential system established

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APPENDIX A: KEY THEORETICAL DOCUMENTS OF THE PBSP IN THE PERIOD 1971 TO 1973

A.1 The Draft Party Constitution of September 1971: Summary and Analysis

The draft constitution, written by Sikder in September 1971 while the liberation war was still ongoing, established the organizational framework of the PBSP. Its key provisions have been analyzed in Chapter Eight, but a summary is useful for reference.

The constitution establishes:

The ideological foundation of the party: Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

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The party's goal: the new democratic revolution, to be completed through protracted people's war, leading to the establishment of a People's Democratic Republic of East Bengal.

The organizational principle: democratic centralism, with strict discipline binding lower bodies to implement the decisions of higher bodies.

The membership criteria: active participation in party work, acceptance of the party programme and constitution, payment of dues, and subordination of personal interests to party interests.

The disciplinary procedures: criticism and self-criticism as a regular organizational practice, with provision for expulsion of members who engage in factionalism, betrayal, or serious political errors.

The mass organization policy: the party maintains its organizational independence from mass organizations while providing political leadership through party members within those organizations.

The armed forces policy: the party maintains direct control over its armed forces through political commissars assigned to military units.

A.2 "Exposure of the Draft Strategy and Program": Key Arguments

Sikder's April 1972 polemic against the rival "East Bengal Communist Party" establishes several theoretical positions that illuminate the PBSP's own theoretical framework.

First: the liberation war was a genuine national liberation struggle that the PBSP correctly participated in, but its class leadership was bourgeois (the Awami League) rather than proletarian.

Second: the independent Bangladesh state is a comprador bourgeois state, not a people's democratic state, because it serves the interests of the Bengali bourgeoisie and its international sponsors (Indian and Soviet social-imperialism) rather than the interests of the working class and peasantry.

Third: the correct revolutionary strategy is the continuation of the new democratic revolution through protracted people's war against the comprador government, not accommodation to or collaboration with that government.

Fourth: the principal contradictions in post-independence Bangladesh are: nationally, the contradiction between the comprador bourgeoisie and the people of East Bengal; internationally, the contradiction between imperialism and social-imperialism on one side and the people of East Bengal on the other.

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Fifth: the correct international alignments for the revolutionary movement are opposition to all three imperialist and expansionist powers (the United States, the Soviet Union, and India) and support for the struggle of peoples throughout the world against imperialism.

GLOSSARY FOR PART TWO

Armed Patriotic Force of East Bengal (Purba Banglar Sashastra Dheshapremik Bahini, PBSD): The paramilitary force established by Sikder on April 30, 1971, as the military wing of the revolutionary movement during the liberation war. Distinct from the Awami League's Mukti Bahini in its class composition and political orientation.

BAKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League): The single political party established by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in January 1975, which replaced all other political parties and established a presidential system. Widely regarded as an authoritarian turn that violated the democratic principles of the 1972 constitution.

Blood Telegram: The dissent cable sent by US Consul General Archer Blood from Dhaka in April 1971, documenting Pakistani military atrocities and condemning the Nixon administration's silence. A key primary source for the history of the liberation war.

Comprador bourgeoisie: In Maoist political economy, the section of the local bourgeoisie that serves primarily as an intermediary for foreign capital. The PBSP characterized the Awami League government as a comprador government because of its dependence on Indian support and accommodation to international capital.

Gono Obbhuthan: The mass uprising of 1969 in East Pakistan that toppled Ayub Khan. Literally "mass uprising" in Bengali.

Mass line: Mao Zedong's organizational principle for the revolutionary party, requiring a constant dialectical relationship between the party's theoretical knowledge and the consciousness and experience of the masses.

National Liberation Front of East Bengal (Purba Banglar Jatiya Mukti Front): The political coalition formed by the PBSP in April 1973, comprising eleven mass organizations under the PBSP's leadership, which declared war on the Bangladeshi government.

New democratic revolution: Mao Zedong's theory of the transitional revolutionary form appropriate to semi-colonial and semi-feudal societies, in which a broad united front led by the proletariat overthrows imperialism, feudalism, and comprador capitalism before proceeding to socialist construction.

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Operation Searchlight: The Pakistani military's assault on East Pakistan beginning on March 25, 1971, which opened the Bangladesh liberation war. Characterized by systematic violence against Bengali civilian populations.

Peyarabagan: The "guava garden" area in Bhimruli, Jhalokati district, which served as the PBSP's primary base area during the liberation war. Site of the party's founding on June 3, 1971.

Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party (PBSP): The Proletarian Party of East Bengal, founded by Siraj Sikder on June 3, 1971, at Peyarabagan. The organizational successor to the East Bengal Workers Movement and the primary organizational expression of Sikder's Maoist revolutionary project.

Rakkhi Bahini: A special paramilitary force created by the Mujib government in 1972, outside the regular military and police command structure, that was used for counterinsurgency operations against the PBSP and other armed opposition groups. Notorious for extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and torture.

Remedial secession: In contemporary international law scholarship (developed primarily by Allen Buchanan and others), the doctrine that a people subject to systematic, severe, and ongoing violations of fundamental human rights who have exhausted other alternatives may acquire a right to secession as a remedy of last resort.

Social-imperialism: In Maoist political vocabulary (borrowed from Lenin's original term), the characterization of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev as an imperialist power operating under the cover of socialist ideology. The PBSP regarded the Soviet Union as a social-imperialist power alongside the United States as a straightforwardly imperialist power.

Subaltern: In postcolonial theory (associated with the Subaltern Studies collective), those who are excluded from formal political structures and from the historical narratives produced by dominant classes. The concept is relevant for assessing whose interests the PBSP genuinely represented and what the experience of the liberation struggle was from the perspective of the rural poor.

Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace (1972): The bilateral treaty signed between Bangladesh and India in March 1972, which established the framework for the close Indian-Bangladeshi relationship in the immediate post-independence period. The PBSP criticized this treaty as an instrument of Indian expansionism.

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End of Part Two

Part Three: "The Capture, the Death, and the Unfinished Revolution: The Final Year of Siraj Sikder and the Question of Justice (1974 to 1975)" will follow.

A Note on Part Two's Methodology and Sources

Part Two has drawn on a combination of primary sources (Sikder's own theoretical writings, available through the Marxists.org archive and Sarbaharapath.com), historical scholarship on the liberation war and the early years of Bangladesh, and theoretical works from the Marxist, postcolonial, jurisprudential, and political philosophy traditions. Where factual claims about specific events are disputed or uncertain, this has been noted.

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The period from 1971 to 1973 in Bangladesh's history is relatively well-documented in terms of the broad political events (the liberation war, independence, the formation of the PBSP, the early activities of the party), but much less well-documented in terms of the internal organizational life of the PBSP, the specific operations of its armed cadres, and the experience of the rural poor whom it sought to organize. The most important primary source for internal party history from this period is Mohiuddin Ahmad's "Lal Shontrash," which is based on interviews with surviving party members and associates. This source is valuable but needs to be used critically, as with all oral history sources, particularly sources that were collected decades after the events they describe and from individuals who have their own complex relationships to the history they recount.

The theoretical analysis in this Part has deliberately engaged with recent scholarship, including work produced in 2024, 2025, and 2026, in order to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the questions that Sikder's life raises and the ways in which contemporary theoretical developments illuminate those questions. This approach reflects the textbook's overall conviction that the significance of Siraj Sikder's life and thought is not merely historical but speaks to enduring questions about revolutionary politics, the nature of the postcolonial state, the relationship between national liberation and social emancipation, and the ethics of political violence under conditions of systematic injustice.

PART THREE: THE CAPTURE, THE DEATH, AND THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION: THE FINAL YEAR OF SIRAJ SIKDER AND THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE (1974 TO 1975)

Preface to Part Three

Part Two of this textbook traced the extraordinary compressed arc of events from the mass uprising of 1969 through the liberation war of 1971, the founding of the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party, and the first difficult years of the party's struggle against the newly independent Bangladeshi government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It ended with the introduction of BAKSAL in January 1975, the single-party authoritarian restructuring of the Bangladeshi state that represented the culmination of the Mujib government's increasingly repressive political trajectory.

Part Three begins in the final months of Siraj Sikder's life. By late 1974, the PBSP was under enormous and growing pressure from government counterinsurgency operations. The Rakkhi Bahini and police forces had killed many of the party's cadres, disrupted its organizational networks, and driven the surviving leadership into increasingly precarious conditions of clandestine existence. Sikder himself was moving constantly, maintaining operational security

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through mobility, changing his location frequently, and relying on the loyalty of a shrinking circle of trusted comrades.

The events of January 1975 represent the convergence of this organizational crisis with a specific act of state violence that has remained legally unresolved and morally contested for fifty years: Sikder's arrest, his killing while in state custody, and the Bangladeshi government's response to the news of his death. These events constitute one of the most significant and most disturbing episodes in the political history of Bangladesh, raising fundamental questions about state violence, extrajudicial killing, the rule of law, political accountability, and the meaning of justice that remain as urgent in 2026 as they were in January 1975.

Part Three is organized around three principal analytical threads. The first is historical: a careful reconstruction of what is known and what remains uncertain about the circumstances of Sikder's arrest and death. The second is jurisprudential and philosophical: an examination of the legal and moral questions raised by extrajudicial killing, custodial death, and state impunity, drawing on international human rights law, constitutional jurisprudence, and political philosophy. The third is theoretical: an assessment of the legacy of the PBSP, the significance of Sikder's theoretical contributions, and the ways in which his project, incomplete and in many respects failed, continues to illuminate questions that remain unresolved in contemporary Bangladeshi politics and in the broader field of revolutionary theory.

This Part is written with particular attention to the events of 2024 and 2025, including the July 2024 uprising that ended Hasina's government, the fifty-year commemoration of Sikder's death in January 2025, and the renewed scholarly and political interest in his legacy that these events have generated. The question of what Siraj Sikder's life and death mean for the present moment in Bangladesh and for the broader project of thinking about justice, revolution, and the relationship between law and political legitimacy is one that this Part will engage with seriously and directly.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE LONG DECLINE: THE PBSP IN CRISIS, 1973 TO 1974

15.1 The Organizational Crisis of the PBSP

The period from mid-1973 through 1974 was one of progressive organizational deterioration for the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party. Understanding the specific dynamics of this deterioration is essential for understanding both the circumstances that led to Sikder's capture in January 1975 and the broader question of why the most theoretically sophisticated Maoist organization in Bangladesh's history was unable to sustain itself against the pressures of state counterinsurgency.

The deterioration operated on several simultaneous levels. At the military level, the Rakkhi Bahini's counterinsurgency operations in the southern delta districts that constituted the PBSP's primary base were progressively disrupting the party's armed networks. The Rakkhi Bahini,

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though it was notorious for its lack of legal restraint, was effective as a counterinsurgency force precisely because it was willing to use tactics that regular police and military forces would have been reluctant to employ: collective punishment of communities suspected of harboring PBSP sympathizers, extrajudicial killing of individuals identified as party members or contacts, torture to extract information about organizational networks, and the deliberate targeting of the party's best-known and most experienced cadres.

At the organizational level, the losses of experienced cadres through killing, capture, and the flight of some members out of the party created a problem of organizational replenishment that the PBSP was finding increasingly difficult to manage. The party's ability to recruit new members was hampered by the climate of fear that the Rakkhi Bahini's operations had created in the areas of the party's strength. Potential recruits faced the very real prospect of being killed or imprisoned if their association with the party was discovered. The training and political education of new recruits, which in better conditions would have taken months, was compressed under operational pressures in ways that reduced the political quality of new cadres.

At the political level, the party was increasingly isolated from the broader political landscape. The introduction of BAKSAL in January 1975, which was still in the future at this point, was anticipated by the increasingly authoritarian political climate that had developed through 1973 and 1974. The legal political parties that might have provided some degree of cover or solidarity for the PBSP's broader political activities were themselves under growing pressure. The press was increasingly restricted. Public political organization outside the Awami League's framework was becoming progressively more dangerous.

At the international level, the PBSP had no significant external support. Its pro-Chinese theoretical alignment meant that the Soviet-aligned international communist movement offered nothing. The Chinese government, which had supported Pakistan during the liberation war and whose relations with the new Bangladeshi government had only gradually normalized, was not disposed to support a Bangladeshi revolutionary organization that was conducting armed struggle against the Bangladeshi government. The Naxalite organizations in India, with which the PBSP had some connections, were themselves under severe repression and had no resources to offer.

The combination of these pressures created a situation in which the PBSP's organizational survival required Sikder and the leadership to make difficult choices about priorities, resources, and the pace of military operations. The evidence from the historical record suggests that by 1974, the PBSP's armed operations were becoming more sporadic and reactive, responding to specific local situations rather than implementing a coherent strategic plan, as the organizational infrastructure that would have been necessary for coordinated strategic action was progressively degraded by Rakkhi Bahini operations.

15.2 Internal Contradictions: The Problem of Party Discipline Under Pressure

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The organizational pressures of counterinsurgency operations also intensified the internal contradictions within the PBSP that had always been present but had been managed, however imperfectly, during periods of relative organizational strength. The most serious of these internal contradictions concerned the practice of party discipline and the handling of accusations of betrayal within the organization.

In any clandestine revolutionary organization facing active state repression, the fear of infiltration and betrayal is omnipresent. The security of the organization depends on maintaining strict operational secrecy, and any breach of that secrecy can and does have fatal consequences for exposed members. This creates enormous pressure to identify and punish individuals suspected of providing information to the enemy, and it creates conditions in which the standards of evidence and due process that would be applied in ordinary circumstances are easily overridden by security imperatives.

The historical record of the PBSP, as preserved in the memoirs and accounts collected in Mohiuddin Ahmad's research, includes credible accounts of internal violence within the party during this period: individuals accused of betrayal or serious political errors who were subjected to internal proceedings whose evidentiary standards were inadequate and whose outcomes were sometimes death. The reliability and completeness of these accounts is not beyond question, given the complex relationships that those providing them had with the party and with the events they describe. But the accounts are sufficiently consistent and credible to require acknowledgment.

The theoretical framework that justified such internal proceedings was drawn from the Maoist tradition's concept of struggle against counter-revolutionary infiltration and revisionism. Every communist party of the period, including the Chinese Communist Party itself under Mao's Cultural Revolution (which was producing its own internal violence on a far larger scale), engaged in internal "purification" campaigns directed against real or imagined political enemies within the party. The problem was not the principle that a party must defend itself against infiltration and betrayal, which is a genuine organizational necessity for any clandestine organization, but the standards and procedures through which this defense was conducted.

The jurisprudential problem is fundamental. Any system of adjudication, however informal, that determines the life or death of accused persons requires minimum standards of fairness: the opportunity for the accused to hear the charges against them, to respond to those charges, to present evidence in their defense, and to have their case reviewed by someone other than their accuser. These minimum standards, which constitute the core of what international human rights law calls the "right to a fair trial" under Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, are not optional luxuries in the application of justice: they are the conditions that distinguish justice from arbitrary violence. When a party engages in killings of its own members based on accusations that are not adequately tested against these minimum standards, it has crossed a moral and legal line that cannot be justified by the political emergency of counterinsurgency.

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This is not a criticism that applies uniquely to the PBSP. The history of revolutionary movements worldwide, from the French Terror through the Soviet purges, the Cultural Revolution, the Khmer Rouge, and the various internal purges of Latin American and Asian guerrilla organizations, is replete with examples of exactly this kind of internal violence. The cross-cultural and cross-historical frequency of this phenomenon suggests that it is not the product of individual moral failures but of the structural dynamics of clandestine revolutionary organizations under conditions of extreme pressure: dynamics that consistently produce the temptation to resolve uncertainty about loyalty through violence rather than through patient investigation and due process.

15.3 The Political Economy of Rural Violence and Class Struggle in 1974

The year 1974 was, as we analyzed in Part Two, the year of the great Bangladesh famine, one of the most catastrophic humanitarian disasters in the history of the country. The specific impact of the famine on the areas where the PBSP was organizing is important for understanding the political dynamics of the party's rural work in its final period.

The famine hit the rural poor with devastating force, destroying the food security of the landless and near-landless peasants who constituted the PBSP's intended mass base. In the areas of the Barisal delta where the PBSP had its primary organizational networks, the combination of flooding, grain speculation, and distribution failures produced conditions of acute starvation that killed many people and drove many more to desperate measures for survival.

The PBSP's response to the famine conditions combined political agitation with direct action. Party cadres organized distributions of seized grain (taken from landlords and merchants identified as hoarders and speculators), defended peasants against eviction by landlords seeking to use the crisis to acquire more land, and organized collective resistance to the most egregious forms of rural exploitation. These activities, whatever their legal status, addressed real and immediate humanitarian needs and help explain why the PBSP retained organizational support in some rural areas even as government counterinsurgency operations intensified.

The political economy of the famine also illustrated, in the starkest possible terms, the class analysis that the PBSP had been making about the Awami League government. The government's failure to protect the rural poor from the worst effects of the famine, its failure to control grain speculation, and the specific behavior of Awami League-affiliated political figures who in some areas used the famine conditions to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor, all appeared to vindicate the PBSP's characterization of the Awami League as a comprador party serving the interests of the propertied classes rather than those of the working people.

This vindication, however bitter, did not translate into political strength for the PBSP. The party's organizational capacity was too degraded by counterinsurgency operations to take advantage of whatever political opportunities the famine conditions created. And the famine itself was destroying the material and organizational resources of precisely the rural communities on which the party's mass base depended.

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15.4 Mujib's Bangladesh in 1974: Authoritarianism, Economic Crisis, and Political Exhaustion

The Bangladesh of 1974 was a country in deep crisis across multiple dimensions simultaneously. The economic crisis of the famine overlapped with a political crisis of increasing authoritarianism and corruption, a security crisis produced by both the PBSP's armed campaign and various other forms of organized violence, and a governance crisis as the Awami League's political project showed signs of progressive exhaustion and corruption.

The Awami League government of 1972 to 1975 has been the subject of extensive historical reassessment, particularly in the context of the July 2024 uprising and the subsequent political moment in Bangladesh. The reassessment has not been entirely negative: scholars have noted the genuine achievements of the early post-independence period, including the relatively rapid drafting of a progressive constitution, the establishment of basic state institutions, and the management of the diplomatic challenges of establishing a new state in a complex regional environment. But the reassessment has also been frank about the failures: the corruption that became pervasive within the Awami League's political network, the failure to implement meaningful land reform, the inadequate response to the famine, the increasing use of repressive security measures against political opponents, and the final authoritarian turn of BAKSAL.

For our purposes, the important point is that the political trajectory of the Mujib government through 1974 was in a direction that appeared to confirm several of the PBSP's analytical predictions. The government that had come to power with enormous popular legitimacy in 1972 had, within two years, presided over a catastrophic famine, consolidated a climate of political repression, and was preparing the ground for a formal abandonment of democratic governance. This trajectory did not vindicate the PBSP's specific strategic choices (the decision to move immediately to armed struggle against the government after independence), but it did suggest that the class analysis underlying those choices had captured something real about the limitations of Awami League governance.

The crisis of the Mujib government was also, from a political theory perspective, a crisis of what Gramsci would have called hegemony: the Awami League's capacity to maintain not merely political power but genuine popular consent for its leadership was eroding rapidly. The government was relying increasingly on the coercive instruments of the Rakkhi Bahini and emergency powers, and decreasingly on the voluntary political support that it had commanded in 1972. This erosion of hegemony, which the BAKSAL restructuring of January 1975 was partly an attempt to arrest, ultimately made the government vulnerable to the military coup of August 1975 in ways that few observers had fully anticipated.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE FINAL MONTHS: OPERATION AGAINST THE PBSP AND SIKDER'S CAPTURE

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16.1 The Intensification of Counterinsurgency Operations: Late 1974

By the latter half of 1974, the Bangladeshi government's counterinsurgency campaign against the PBSP had intensified significantly. The Rakkhi Bahini, supplemented by regular police, was conducting systematic operations across the districts of the southern delta and in Dhaka, aimed at identifying and neutralizing the PBSP's organizational networks and leadership.

The government's intelligence capacity against the PBSP had been developing throughout the post-independence period through a combination of infiltration of the party's networks, the interrogation of captured or surrendered party members, and the systematic cultivation of informants in the communities where the party was active. By late 1974, this intelligence apparatus had developed a significantly more complete picture of the PBSP's organizational structure and the locations of key leaders than it had possessed in 1972 or 1973.

Sikder himself was the primary target of the counterinsurgency effort. The government understood, correctly, that the elimination of the PBSP's central leadership would be far more damaging to the organization than the continued attrition of its ordinary cadres. Sikder's ability to evade capture for three years of active revolutionary work, during which he was a named and intensely sought target of the government's security apparatus, is itself a remarkable fact that reflects both his organizational and personal capabilities and the genuine popular support that the PBSP's networks had been able to maintain in certain areas.

The specific intelligence that led to Sikder's eventual capture appears to have come through a combination of several sources, including informants within or connected to the PBSP's networks, the surveillance of known associates, and the pressure that had been applied to captured party members. The precise chain of intelligence that led to the location of Sikder in Chittagong in late December 1974 is not fully documented in the public record, and some aspects of the account remain uncertain or disputed.

16.2 Chittagong, December 1974: The Circumstances of Arrest

Siraj Sikder was arrested at Hali Shahar in Chittagong, a port city in southeastern Bangladesh, in late December 1974. The specific date of the arrest is given as December 31, 1974, or January 1, 1975, in different accounts, reflecting the uncertainty that surrounds even the most basic facts of his final days.

Chittagong had become one of the areas where the PBSP had organizational activity, partly because of the presence of a working-class community connected to the port and industrial facilities, and partly because of the party's efforts to extend its organizational base beyond the Barisal delta to create a broader territorial reach. Sikder's presence in Chittagong suggests that he was engaged in organizational work there, though the specific activities he was conducting at the time of his arrest are not fully documented.

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The arrest was carried out by the government's intelligence forces. The accounts of the arrest that have been pieced together from various sources, including the account presented in Mohiuddin Ahmad's "Lal Shontrash" based on interviews with individuals who had access to relevant information, including a former senior official of the Rakkhi Bahini, indicate that Sikder was taken into custody without significant physical resistance. Whether this was because he was surprised before he could attempt escape, or because escape was physically impossible given the circumstances, or for some other reason, is not entirely clear.

The fact of the arrest was publicly confirmed almost immediately. Sikder was the most wanted political fugitive in Bangladesh, and his capture was a significant political event that the government had reason to publicize, both as evidence of the effectiveness of its counterinsurgency operations and as a political signal to the PBSP and to the broader left that the government had the capacity to reach even the highest-level targets of its security operations.

The legal status of Sikder at the moment of his arrest was that of a political fugitive who was wanted for a range of offenses under Bangladeshi law, including charges related to the PBSP's armed operations. Had he been taken before a court, he would have faced serious criminal charges. The legal proceedings would have been highly politicized, but they would at least have provided a forum in which the specific charges could have been stated, evidence presented, and a form of due process observed.

What happened instead was that Sikder was killed while in state custody.

16.3 The Death: What Is Known and What Remains Uncertain

On January 2, 1975, Siraj Sikder was dead. He was thirty years old. The manner and circumstances of his death are the most contested and the most morally and politically significant facts in the entire narrative of his life.

The official account provided by the Bangladeshi government was that Sikder had been killed while attempting to escape from custody. This "died while attempting to escape" account, which has a long and notorious history as a government euphemism for extrajudicial killing in custody across many countries and political systems, has been almost universally rejected by historians, political analysts, and human rights organizations who have examined the available evidence.

The most detailed account of the circumstances of Sikder's death comes from Mohiuddin Ahmad's research, which drew on four sources: three published accounts and one interview conducted with a then-serving senior official of the Rakkhi Bahini. This account indicates that Sikder was transported by air from Chittagong to Dhaka after his arrest, and that he was killed on the road from Dhaka's Tejgaon airport to the Rakkhi Bahini camp at Savar. The killing was carried out by members of the security forces who were escorting him, and it was not a killing in response to a genuine escape attempt but a deliberate act of extrajudicial execution.

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The most prominent public statement about the responsibility for Sikder's death was made by Siraj Sikder's sister, the sculptor Shamim Sikder, who publicly accused Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of ordering her brother's killing. Anthony Mascarenhas, the British-Pakistani journalist whose book "Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood" remains one of the most important accounts of the political violence of the early Bangladesh period, recorded Shamim Sikder's accusation and gave it significant weight.

Whether Mujib personally ordered the killing, or whether it was ordered by other figures within the security apparatus, or whether it resulted from the initiative of specific security officers acting without explicit authorization from the top, cannot be definitively established on the basis of currently available evidence. What can be said is that the killing occurred under the authority of the Bangladeshi state, that the state subsequently covered it with a false "attempted escape" narrative, and that no one has ever been held legally accountable for Sikder's death.

16.4 The Mujib Speech and Its Significance

Perhaps the most notorious single fact associated with Sikder's death is the speech delivered by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the national parliament shortly after the announcement of Sikder's killing. In this speech, Mujib is reported to have asked, rhetorically, "Kothay Siraj Sikder?" ("Where is Siraj Sikder?"), to which members of parliament responded with celebration at the news of his death.

This parliamentary episode, if accurately reported (and it has been consistently reported across multiple independent sources), represents a profound breach of constitutional and legal principle. A prime minister publicly celebrating the extrajudicial killing of a political opponent, in the parliament of a constitutional state that was formally committed to the rule of law and to the protection of fundamental rights, represents the clearest possible statement that the government regarded the law as an instrument to be wielded for political purposes rather than as a constraint on government power.

The parliamentary episode also had significant political consequences. It made the government's responsibility for Sikder's death impossible to deny plausibly, whatever the specific mechanism or chain of authorization for the killing. It demonstrated, in the most public possible forum, that the Mujib government was willing to use extrajudicial killing as an instrument of counterinsurgency. And it immortalized Sikder's death as a political event that could not be ignored or minimized, transforming him from a hunted revolutionary into a political martyr whose significance would outlast the government that had killed him.

The political irony is profound. The Mujib government, by killing Sikder without trial and then publicly celebrating his death, did more to ensure the permanence of his revolutionary legacy than any act of the PBSP itself. A Sikder tried, convicted, and imprisoned would have been a political problem that could be managed. A Sikder killed extrajudicially and celebrated in parliament became a symbol that could never be fully contained or controlled, a symbol that has continued to generate political meaning for fifty years.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE JURISPRUDENCE OF EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLING AND CUSTODIAL DEATH

17.1 Extrajudicial Killing in International Human Rights Law

The killing of Siraj Sikder while in state custody raises fundamental questions of international human rights law that have been the subject of extensive legal scholarship and international standard-setting in the decades since his death. Examining these legal frameworks is important both for understanding the specific legal significance of what happened to Sikder and for placing his case within the broader context of international jurisprudence on state violence.

The fundamental legal prohibition on extrajudicial killing is derived from the right to life, which is protected under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966), Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and numerous regional human rights instruments. The right to life is one of the most fundamental human rights: it is non-derogable under Article 4 of the ICCPR even in states of public emergency, meaning that states cannot justify derogations from the right to life on grounds of national security or public order, however serious the security situation.

Bangladesh was not yet a party to the ICCPR at the time of Sikder's death in January 1975 (Bangladesh acceded to the ICCPR in 2000), and the international human rights law framework was in a state of development in the 1970s that was less fully elaborated than it has since become. Nevertheless, the basic principle that states may not kill their prisoners without legal process was established in international law well before 1975, and Bangladesh's 1972 Constitution provided extensive domestic legal protections that were violated by the killing.

The constitutional framework is important. The 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh guaranteed the right to life and personal liberty under Article 31, which provided that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except in accordance with law. Article 33 provided that a person who is arrested shall not be detained in custody without being produced before the nearest magistrate within twenty-four hours of such arrest, and no person shall be detained in custody beyond the period without the authority of a magistrate. Article 35(3) provided that no person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.

The killing of Sikder while in custody, on the road from the airport to a security installation, violated Articles 31 and 33 of the Constitution at minimum: Sikder was deprived of life without being brought before a magistrate, without any legal process, and without any opportunity to challenge the legal basis for his detention. These constitutional violations were not minor technical infringements: they struck at the most fundamental constitutional commitment to the rule of law.

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The concept of "custodial death," which refers to deaths occurring while a person is in the custody of state agents, has been the subject of extensive development in international human rights law and in the constitutional jurisprudence of numerous countries. The UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (UN General Assembly Resolution 44/162, 1989) establish that states have the obligation to conduct thorough and impartial investigations of all cases of custodial death and to hold accountable those responsible for unlawful killings. The Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Istanbul Protocol, 1999) provides detailed technical standards for the investigation of deaths in custody.

These specific legal instruments were developed after Sikder's death, but they codify legal principles that were already inherent in the broader framework of international human rights law. More importantly, they provide the framework through which the Bangladesh case can be assessed from the perspective of contemporary international human rights jurisprudence, and through which the continuing failure to investigate and prosecute those responsible for Sikder's death can be evaluated.

17.2 The Doctrine of State Impunity and Its Consequences

The term "impunity" refers, in international human rights law and transitional justice scholarship, to the failure of states to hold accountable those responsible for violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Impunity is not merely the absence of prosecution: it is a systemic condition in which state agents who commit serious human rights violations know that they will not face legal consequences, and in which this knowledge itself shapes the behavior of those agents and the institutions within which they operate.

The consequences of impunity for Sikder's killing have been severe and lasting. No investigation was ever conducted into the circumstances of his death. No one was ever charged or prosecuted for the killing. The government's false "attempted escape" narrative was never formally retracted. The individuals responsible for the killing were never identified in any official proceeding. And the broader pattern of extrajudicial killing that characterized the Mujib government's treatment of political opponents was never subjected to any form of truth-telling or accountability process.

The analysis of impunity has been one of the central concerns of transitional justice scholarship, a field that has developed enormously since the 1980s in connection with the transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia. The foundational texts of transitional justice scholarship, including Ruti Teitel's "Transitional Justice" (2000), Jon Elster's "Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective" (2004), and Pablo de Greiff's extensive writings on justice, truth, and reparation, establish the importance of accountability mechanisms for past human rights violations as a condition for genuine democratic transition and for the prevention of future violations.

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The Bangladesh case is particularly complex from a transitional justice perspective. The Mujib government itself was overthrown in a military coup in August 1975, just seven months after Sikder's killing. Mujib and most of his family were killed in that coup. The political transitions that Bangladesh subsequently experienced, through periods of military rule, partial democratization, and the complex political history of the Awami League and BNP alternation in power, were not accompanied by any sustained attempt at transitional justice for the violence of the early independence period, including the Rakkhi Bahini's activities and the specific killing of Sikder.

The July 2024 uprising and the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government have created a new political moment in Bangladesh in which questions of accountability for past human rights violations have become more prominently discussed. The interim government that took power after the uprising has established various bodies to investigate the violence of the Hasina period and to address the accountability deficit of the past fifteen years. Whether this process of accountability will extend to the earlier period of the 1970s, and to the specific question of Sikder's killing, remains to be seen.

17.3 The "Shoot on Sight" Order and Its Jurisprudential Implications

Multiple historical accounts of the period suggest that the Mujib government, through the Rakkhi Bahini and other security forces, operated under informal or formal "shoot on sight" orders with respect to PBSP leaders, including Sikder. The concept of a "shoot on sight" order, by which security forces are authorized to kill specified individuals rather than arrest them, raises fundamental jurisprudential questions that deserve extended analysis.

The legal framework applicable to the use of lethal force by law enforcement is established at the international level by the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (adopted in 1990 but reflecting principles that existed in international law before that date). These principles establish that law enforcement officials may use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life, and that lethal force may not be used against persons who do not present an immediate threat to life. The principles explicitly prohibit the use of lethal force as a method of apprehension for persons who are merely suspected of having committed serious offenses.

The distinction between a lawful shooting in self-defense or in defense of others (when the target presents an immediate threat) and an unlawful extrajudicial execution is fundamental in international law. A "shoot on sight" order, which authorizes killing regardless of whether the target presents an immediate threat, is incompatible with this framework and constitutes an authorization of extrajudicial execution. States that issue such orders are not merely permitting individual officers to violate the law: they are themselves violating international human rights law at the institutional level, which is a more fundamental violation because it reflects deliberate policy rather than individual misconduct.

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The legal analysis of Sikder's specific case, if it were subject to formal legal proceedings, would need to assess whether the security forces that killed him were acting under some form of authorization (explicit or implicit) to kill rather than to arrest, or whether the killing reflected the spontaneous decision of individual officers exceeding their authority. The distinction matters legally (the former would involve direct state responsibility at a higher level than the latter) and politically (it determines the scope of the accountability that ought to be demanded).

The circumstantial evidence, including the "attempted escape" narrative that the government immediately deployed, the parliamentary celebration, and the general pattern of the Rakkhi Bahini's operations, strongly suggests that the killing of Sikder was not a random act of individual officers but reflected either an explicit policy or an institutional culture in which the killing of specified targets was considered legitimate and was implicitly authorized. This conclusion, if correct, places primary legal and moral responsibility at the level of political leadership rather than individual security officers.

17.4 Comparative Analysis: Extrajudicial Killing of Political Opponents in the Global Context

Sikder's killing, while specific to Bangladesh, reflects a broader pattern of state violence against political opponents that has occurred across many countries and political systems. Examining this comparative context is important both for understanding what happened to Sikder and for assessing the broader jurisprudential significance of the issue.

The killing of political prisoners in custody has been one of the most persistent forms of state violence throughout modern history. It has occurred under governments of the left, the right, and the center; in wealthy and poor countries; in established democracies (where it typically occurs in the context of colonial situations or in marginalized communities) and in authoritarian states. The specific mechanisms vary: the false "attempted escape" story used in Sikder's case is one of the most common covers for custodial killing, but there are many others, including "suicide" during interrogation, "died of illness" stories, and simply the disappearance of the person in custody with no subsequent explanation.

The comparative case that offers perhaps the closest structural parallels to Sikder's killing, in terms of political context, organizational involvement, and the specific mechanics of custodial killing, is the killing of Steve Biko in South Africa in September 1977. Biko, the Black Consciousness leader who was a major intellectual and organizational figure of the anti-apartheid movement, was arrested by South African security police in August 1977 and died in police custody after being severely tortured. The security forces initially claimed that Biko had died from a hunger strike, a claim that was quickly exposed as false by independent medical investigation.

The Biko case is significant for our analysis of Sikder for several reasons. First, it illustrates the pattern of the cover story: security forces who commit custodial killings almost invariably produce a false explanation, and the exposure of that false explanation is typically the first step

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toward accountability. Second, the Biko case shows the importance of independent medical and forensic investigation: the pathologist Jonathan Levin, who contradicted the government's account of Biko's death, played a crucial role in establishing the truth. In the Bangladesh case, no comparable independent investigation of Sikder's death was ever conducted, which is part of why the full circumstances remain uncertain.

Third, the Biko case illustrates the eventual possibilities of accountability: the specific security officers who killed Biko were eventually identified and applied for amnesty before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990s, where their application was rejected because they had not made full disclosure of all relevant facts. This example shows that accountability for past custodial killings, even after many decades, is possible under conditions of political transition, and it provides a model that could potentially be relevant for Bangladesh.

The cases of Che Guevara (killed in Bolivia in 1967 while in custody after capture by Bolivian military forces with CIA assistance), Patrice Lumumba (killed in the Congo in 1961 under circumstances involving Belgian and American complicity), and Thomas Sankara (killed in Burkina Faso in 1987 in a coup organized by his former ally Blaise Compaore) are also relevant comparative cases. Each illustrates the way in which the killing of a captured revolutionary or leader of a government can be simultaneously an act of state violence and a political event with lasting historical significance that outlasts the political calculations that motivated it.

17.5 The Role of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: Historical and Legal Assessment

The question of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's personal responsibility for Siraj Sikder's death is one of the most contested aspects of the entire narrative. Shamim Sikder's accusation was direct and personal: she held Mujib responsible for her brother's death. The historical and legal assessment of this responsibility requires careful analysis.

Several levels of responsibility need to be distinguished. The most direct level is operational responsibility: who specifically ordered or carried out the killing? The most direct level of state responsibility is the responsibility of the political leaders who created the institutional and political conditions in which the killing occurred: who created the Rakkhi Bahini, authorized its operations, tolerated its abuses, and created the political culture in which the extrajudicial killing of political opponents was acceptable?

At the first level, the available evidence does not conclusively establish that Mujib personally ordered the killing of Sikder specifically. The chain of command for the specific operation is not fully documented in the public record. It is possible that the decision was made at a level below the prime minister by security officials who believed, correctly or incorrectly, that such a killing would be authorized and welcomed. It is also possible that there was explicit authorization from higher political levels.

At the second level, Mujib's responsibility is clearer and more difficult to dispute. He created the Rakkhi Bahini. He authorized its operations. He was publicly informed of its abuses and took no

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meaningful action to constrain them. And he publicly celebrated the news of Sikder's death in parliament, which, whatever its specific legal significance, represents a clear statement of political endorsement of the outcome if not necessarily personal authorization of the specific act.

The legal concept that is relevant here is "command responsibility," also known as "superior responsibility," which is a doctrine of international criminal law establishing that military and civilian commanders may be held legally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates if they knew or should have known that the crimes were being committed and took no reasonable steps to prevent them or to punish those responsible. This doctrine, developed initially in the Nuremberg trials and subsequently codified in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 28), has been applied to establish the criminal responsibility of political and military leaders for human rights abuses committed by forces under their authority.

Applying the command responsibility doctrine to Mujib's responsibility for Sikder's death and for the broader pattern of Rakkhi Bahini killings is a complex legal analysis that cannot be fully resolved here. What can be said is that Mujib, as the head of government that created and controlled the Rakkhi Bahini, had both the authority and the responsibility to prevent or punish the extrajudicial killings committed by that force, and that his failure to do so, combined with his public celebration of the specific killing of Sikder, creates a strong moral and potentially legal case for his responsibility at the level of command responsibility.

The complication is that Mujib himself was killed in August 1975, seven months after Sikder's death, and therefore could never be subjected to any legal proceeding. The assassination of Mujib and most of his family in the military coup of August 15, 1975, produced its own massive accountability deficit: the officers responsible for the coup and the killings were subsequently shielded from prosecution by an Indemnity Ordinance that was incorporated into the constitution and that has only been struck down in more recent years.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF MARTYRDOM AND REVOLUTIONARY MEMORY

18.1 The Concept of Political Martyrdom: Theory and Practice

The killing of Siraj Sikder transformed him from a hunted revolutionary into a political martyr, and the concept of political martyrdom is one that deserves sustained philosophical and historical analysis. Martyrdom, in its most general sense, refers to the death of a person for a cause or principle, where the death is imposed by external force and is accepted or suffered by the martyr in fidelity to that cause or principle. The term has deep roots in religious tradition, where it refers primarily to those who die for their faith, but it has been extensively applied in secular political contexts to refer to those who die for political beliefs or political causes.

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The political significance of martyrdom is not simply a function of the martyr's own qualities or the merit of the cause for which they died. It is also a function of the political dynamics of the situation in which the death occurs and the ways in which the death is subsequently remembered and interpreted. Siraj Sikder's transformation into a political martyr was shaped by several specific factors that made his death politically significant in ways that extended far beyond his own organizational movement.

First, the manner of the death: extrajudicial killing while in state custody, followed by the government's false "attempted escape" narrative and then the parliamentary celebration, was a form of state violence that made Sikder's death morally straightforward in a way that deaths in combat or deaths from illness during imprisonment would not have been. There was no ambiguity about whether the state had done something wrong. The government had killed its prisoner without legal process and had then lied about it publicly and celebrated it in parliament. This clear moral picture made it easier for people who disagreed with Sikder's politics to nonetheless regard his killing as an injustice.

Second, the political timing: Sikder was killed just a week before Mujib introduced BAKSAL, the single-party authoritarian restructuring that represented the most dramatic departure from democratic constitutional governance in Bangladesh's short history. The sequence of events, Sikder's extrajudicial killing followed immediately by the abolition of political parties, appeared to many observers as a deliberate strategy of political violence and authoritarian consolidation. In this context, Sikder's death became a symbol not only of what had happened to the revolutionary left but of a broader pattern of authoritarian governance.

Third, the symbolic power of Sikder's personal biography: the civil engineer from a respectable family who chose revolutionary politics, the brilliant student who gave up a career for the cause of the poor, the thirty-year-old killed at the height of his intellectual and organizational powers. These biographical elements made Sikder's story resonant in ways that the biography of a less individually distinctive figure might not have been.

18.2 Revolutionary Memory and Political Commemoration: Historical Analysis

The ways in which Siraj Sikder's memory has been preserved, contested, and mobilized since his death in 1975 constitute a significant chapter in the political and cultural history of Bangladesh. Revolutionary memory is never simply a faithful reproduction of historical events: it is a political practice that selects, emphasizes, interprets, and sometimes distorts historical events in ways that serve specific political purposes in the present.

In the first years after Sikder's death, his memory was maintained primarily within the surviving networks of the PBSP and the broader Bangladeshi left. Annual commemorations of his death on January 2 were organized, initially small and clandestine gatherings but gradually becoming more public as political conditions evolved. His theoretical writings were preserved and disseminated through the networks of left organizations that regarded themselves as continuing his legacy in various ways.

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The political history of Bangladesh after 1975 meant that the official commemoration of Sikder's memory was consistently problematic. During the military rule of Ziaur Rahman (1975 to 1981) and Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1982 to 1990), left political activity was generally restricted, though not entirely prohibited. During the Awami League governments of Sheikh Hasina (1996 to 2001 and 2009 to 2024), the commemoration of a person who had been killed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government and who had fought against it was a politically sensitive matter, though it was generally permitted.

The scholarly and literary dimensions of Sikder's commemorative legacy are also significant. Bangladeshi left poets and writers have produced a substantial body of work commemorating Sikder, treating his life and death as material for political and literary reflection. The political and cultural traditions of the Bangladeshi left have maintained Sikder's memory as a symbol of principled resistance to authoritarian power, and this memorial tradition has given him a continuing presence in Bangladeshi political culture that has outlasted both the PBSP as an organization and the specific political moment of the early 1970s.

18.3 The Philosophy of Historical Judgment: How Should We Assess Siraj Sikder?

The question of how to assess Siraj Sikder's historical significance is one that students, scholars, and political activists have answered very differently, and the range of assessments is itself instructive about the complexity of the subject.

At one extreme, there is the hagiographic tradition that celebrates Sikder as an essentially perfect revolutionary martyr, a figure of uncompromised principle who gave everything for the cause of the oppressed and was murdered by an unjust state. This tradition, which is strongest within the PBSP's organizational successors and within certain currents of the Bangladeshi left, tends to minimize or ignore the genuine failures, errors, and moral problems associated with Sikder's leadership and the PBSP's conduct.

At the other extreme, there is the dismissive tradition that characterizes Sikder as a dangerous fanatic whose theoretical rigidity, organizational authoritarianism, and willingness to use violence produced a movement that ultimately served no one well: not the working class and peasantry in whose name it acted, not the broader Bangladeshi left whose organizational capacities were damaged by competition and conflict with the PBSP, and certainly not the many individuals who were killed in the PBSP's internal violence or in the government counterinsurgency operations that the PBSP's armed campaign provoked. This tradition, which appears in some of the critical assessments by former left activists and in the official history of the Bangladeshi state, tends to minimize or ignore the genuine analytical insights and principled elements of Sikder's revolutionary project.

The philosophical framework that this textbook has sought to apply throughout is one that refuses both of these extreme positions in favor of a genuinely analytical engagement with the full complexity of Sikder's historical significance. This analytical approach, derived from the tradition of critical historical thinking developed by historians from Marc Bloch and E. P.

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Thompson through to the contemporary practitioners of social history and postcolonial studies, requires simultaneously acknowledging both what was valuable and what was flawed in Sikder's project, both the genuine insights and the genuine failures, both the principled commitments and the organizational pathologies.

Applying this framework, the following assessment seems defensible on the basis of the evidence and analysis presented in this textbook:

Sikder's colonial thesis, his analysis of East Bengal's relationship to the Pakistani state as a colonial relationship characterized by systematic economic extraction, political domination, and cultural subordination, was analytically correct in its essential outlines and historically significant as one of the most systematic and theoretically rigorous formulations of what many Bengali people already felt intuitively about their situation.

Sikder's class analysis of the Awami League, his argument that the Awami League represented primarily the interests of the Bengali bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie rather than the working class and peasantry, captured something real and important about the limitations of Bengali nationalism as a vehicle for genuine social transformation. The subsequent history of the Awami League, including the BAKSAL authoritarianism of 1975, the corruption and political repression of the Hasina governments, and the ultimate popular rejection of the Awami League in the July 2024 uprising, has provided significant historical evidence for the validity of this class analysis.

Sikder's strategic choices, particularly the decision to move immediately to armed struggle against the Awami League government after independence without adequate organizational preparation, without accurate assessment of the balance of forces, and in geographical conditions that were fundamentally unsuited to the protracted people's war strategy he was applying, represented serious strategic errors that contributed significantly to the PBSP's organizational failure. These errors cannot be attributed simply to the difficulty of revolutionary work: they reflected specific theoretical and strategic misjudgments that a more flexible and empirically responsive leadership might have avoided.

Sikder's organizational practices, particularly the internal discipline practices that produced unjust violence against accused traitors and deviants within the party, reflected the pathological tendencies of the Leninist vanguard model under conditions of extreme pressure. These practices must be acknowledged and condemned even as one recognizes the structural dynamics that produced them and the genuine security imperatives that motivated them.

Sikder's death at the hands of the state was an extrajudicial killing that violated constitutional and international human rights law, and the state's failure to account for this killing represents a continuing accountability deficit that has moral and legal significance regardless of one's assessment of Sikder's politics.

18.4 Walter Benjamin and the Philosophy of Historical Failure

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The philosopher Walter Benjamin, writing in his final work "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), composed in the last months of his life as he was fleeing Nazi persecution that would eventually claim his life, developed a philosophy of historical memory that is deeply relevant for thinking about Siraj Sikder's legacy.

Benjamin argued against what he called "historicism," the tendency of historical thinking to present history as a progressive narrative of the strong and the successful, in which the past is understood primarily through the lens of what survived and triumphed. Against this tendency, Benjamin insisted on what he called "redemptive remembrance" of the defeated and the forgotten: the obligation of historical memory to preserve the experience and the claims of those who struggled and failed, whose struggles were defeated by superior power but whose aspirations for justice were not thereby proven wrong.

Benjamin's famous "Angel of History" image, in which the angel looks backward at the catastrophe of history, the pile of wreckage that "we" call progress, while being blown forward by the storm of progress, captures something essential about the relationship between revolutionary failure and historical memory. The Sarbahara Party's failure, the defeat of its revolutionary project, does not retroactively validate the injustices against which it struggled. The fact that Sikder and the PBSP did not win does not mean that the poor peasants and landless laborers of the Barisal delta did not suffer, that the exploitation of the rural poor was not a genuine injustice, or that the aspiration for a more just social order was misguided.

Benjamin's philosophy of history also suggests that the most important historical task with respect to failed revolutionary movements is not simply to explain why they failed (though this is important) but to rescue from the wreckage of their failure those elements that remain alive as claims on the future, the specific aspirations, insights, and commitments that retain their validity even after the organizational forms through which they were expressed have been destroyed.

Applied to Siraj Sikder's legacy, this Benjaminian approach suggests that the most important historical task is to identify what in his political project remains alive as a claim on the present and future: what insights are still valid, what aspirations are still unrealized, what questions are still unresolved. This approach is very different from either hagiographic celebration or dismissive condemnation: it requires a discriminating engagement with the legacy that preserves what is valuable while honestly confronting what was flawed.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: THE AFTERMATH: THE PBSP AFTER SIKDER'S DEATH

19.1 The August 1975 Coup and Its Consequences for the Bengali Left

The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his immediate family in the military coup of August 15, 1975, transformed the political landscape of Bangladesh with an abruptness and violence that stunned the country and the world. The coup, carried out by a group of military

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officers led by Major Syed Faruque Rahman, ended the Mujib government and the BAKSAL political experiment in a single night of targeted killing.

The political consequences of the coup for the Bangladeshi left, including the surviving remnants of the PBSP, were complex and somewhat paradoxical. On one level, the removal of the Mujib government eliminated the most direct instrument of state counterinsurgency that had been decimating the PBSP's organizational networks. The Rakkhi Bahini was dissolved after the coup, which removed the specific paramilitary force that had been most directly responsible for the killing of PBSP cadres.

On another level, however, the coup represented a fundamental change in the political situation that the PBSP's theoretical framework had not anticipated and for which the party had no adequate theoretical response. The PBSP had been fighting against the Mujib government as a comprador bourgeois government serving Indian and international imperialist interests. The coup that overthrew it was carried out by military officers whose politics were broadly nationalist, anti-Indian, and not obviously compatible with the "three mountains" of imperialism and social-imperialism that the PBSP's framework had identified as the primary enemies.

The subsequent political history of Bangladesh, as military-dominated governments under Ziaur Rahman and then Ershad pursued policies that included some elements that the PBSP might have approved (greater assertion of Bangladeshi sovereignty against Indian influence, land reform policies, some development expenditure in rural areas) alongside elements that clearly represented class interests hostile to the working class and peasantry (suppression of trade unions, curtailment of peasant organization, accommodation to international financial institutions), left the PBSP without a clear analytical framework for understanding what had happened and what political stance to adopt.

19.2 Organizational Fragmentation: The PBSP's Internal Crisis

Siraj Sikder's death left the PBSP without the central organizational and theoretical authority that had, for all its authoritarian dimensions, maintained the organizational coherence of the party through the preceding seven years. The vacuum left by his death was immediately felt in a wave of internal conflicts, accusations, and violence within the surviving party networks that are among the most disturbing episodes in the Sarbahara Party's history.

The immediate aftermath of Sikder's death saw a period of what can only be described as internal bloodletting, in which accusations of betrayal and responsibility for Sikder's capture flew among surviving party members, and in which these accusations sometimes resulted in internal killings. The accounts of this period, preserved in Mohiuddin Ahmad's research and other sources, describe a party that descended rapidly into organizational chaos and internal violence in the absence of the central authority that had previously maintained order, however imperfectly.

The internal crisis reflected several structural features of the PBSP's organizational model that Sikder's personal authority had been, in part, masking. The strict hierarchical discipline that had

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been maintained under his leadership had not built the kind of genuine internal democratic culture that could have produced stable leadership succession. The culture of accusations and internal proceedings against alleged traitors that had developed during the counterinsurgency period now turned upon itself, as competing factions within the party used the accusations of betrayal as weapons in internal power struggles.

The crisis also reflected the deeper organizational problem that had always existed but had been managed by Sikder's charismatic authority: the gap between the party's theoretical ambitions and its actual organizational capacity, the gap between the small group of committed cadres who constituted the party's real organizational base and the much larger constituency of workers, peasants, and intellectuals that the party claimed to represent and lead.

19.3 The Succession: Hamidul Hoque and the Continuation of the PBSP

The most significant organizational succession within the PBSP after Sikder's death was the assumption of leadership by Md. Hamidul Hoque, who had been described as Sikder's second-in-command. Hoque's leadership of the major faction of the PBSP represented an attempt to continue the party's organizational existence and political work on the basis of the theoretical framework and organizational traditions that Sikder had established.

The Hoque-led PBSP continued to operate as an underground organization, conducting both political and armed activities in the areas where it had organizational networks. Its activities in the late 1970s and 1980s were significantly reduced compared to the period of Sikder's leadership, reflecting both the organizational damage that the post-death crisis had inflicted and the changed political environment of military rule under Ziaur Rahman and subsequently Ershad.

The party's political line under Hoque's leadership maintained the basic theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and the strategy of protracted people's war. But the specific political analysis of the conjuncture was necessarily different from Sikder's analysis, given the changed political landscape of Bangladesh after the August 1975 coup. The PBSP's characterization of the successive post-Mujib governments, their relationship to the three external enemies (the United States, the Soviet Union, and India), and the specific strategy for building revolutionary forces in the new political conditions required theoretical adaptation that was not always successfully accomplished.

A splinter faction of the PBSP departed from Maoism and embraced the political ideology of Albanian communism under Enver Hoxha, eventually establishing itself as a separate party. This split reflected both the fragmentation of the international Maoist movement in the late 1970s (particularly after Mao's death in 1976 and the political changes in China under Deng Xiaoping that many Maoists worldwide experienced as a betrayal of the revolutionary line) and the internal dynamics of the PBSP's own organizational crisis.

19.4 The PBSP's Fifth Party Congress and the Contemporary Situation

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The information available from sources researched for this textbook indicates that the PBSP held its Fifth Party Congress in 2024, the most recent in a series of congresses since the founding congress of 1972. The party continues to operate underground in several districts of Bangladesh, including Sirajganj, Bogra, Pabna, Rajshahi, and Khulna. Under the leadership of Anwarul Kabir (also known as Abdur Rouf), who has served as general secretary since 1977 and was elected chairman at the Fifth Congress, the party remains affiliated with the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA).

The contemporary PBSP's organizational activities include continued armed operations against state police, landlords, and extorters in the areas where it has organizational networks. It remains committed to the strategy of protracted people's war and to the goal of a new democratic revolution in Bangladesh. Its organizational capacity is significantly reduced from the peak of the Sikder period, and its influence in the broader Bangladeshi political landscape is marginal, but it has maintained organizational continuity for more than fifty years despite severe and persistent state repression.

The July 2024 uprising created new political possibilities and new political discussions in Bangladesh about the future direction of the country, and within these discussions the PBSP's legacy and the questions that Siraj Sikder's revolutionary project raised have been actively debated. The party's alignment with the post-uprising political moment is complex: it maintains its position that any government emerging from the existing class structure, including the interim government that took power after the uprising, cannot represent the genuine interests of the working class and peasantry.

CHAPTER TWENTY: SIRAJ SIKDER AS ENGINEER: THE TECHNICAL MIND AND REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICE

20.1 The Engineering Background and Its Significance

One of the most distinctive and underanalyzed aspects of Siraj Sikder's biography is his professional training as a civil engineer. He obtained his civil engineering degree from the East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology (now Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, BUET) in 1967, one of the most technically rigorous educational programs in East Pakistan and indeed in South Asia. He subsequently worked briefly as an engineer, first in the government's Communications and Buildings Department and then for a private company in Teknaf, before leaving professional work to devote himself full-time to revolutionary political activity.

The relationship between technical training and revolutionary political practice is a subject that has received limited scholarly attention but that deserves serious examination in Sikder's case. The qualities that make a good engineer, systematic analytical thinking, attention to structural

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relationships and structural constraints, the ability to identify the specific failure points in complex systems, and the capacity for detailed planning and implementation, are not identical to the qualities that make a good revolutionary politician, but they are not entirely different either.

Sikder's engineering training appears to have shaped his approach to political theory and organizational practice in several specific ways. His theoretical writings are notable for their systematic character: they do not simply assert conclusions but build arguments step by step, identifying premises, working through logical implications, and addressing possible objections. This methodical quality of his theoretical writing reflects a habit of analytical thinking that was cultivated through engineering training.

His approach to organizational structure also reflected an engineer's concern with systems and processes: the PBSP's constitution and organizational procedures were designed with considerable attention to how decisions would be made, how information would flow, and how the various components of the organizational system would interact. Whether or not the organizational design was adequate to the actual conditions of revolutionary work, it reflected a systematic approach to organizational architecture.

20.2 Infrastructure, Technology, and the Political Economy of Development

Sikder's engineering background also gave him a distinctive perspective on the relationship between technical development and political economy. As a civil engineer, he had been trained to think about infrastructure, about the physical systems through which communities are connected, resources are distributed, and economic activity is enabled. His political analysis incorporated an unusually sophisticated understanding of the material infrastructure of Bengali society, including the role of the river system in economic and social organization, the significance of road and railway connections in determining economic geography, and the ways in which infrastructure development (or its absence) reflected and reinforced class power.

The political economy of infrastructure in Bangladesh has been an important dimension of the country's development history. The colonial period left a legacy of infrastructure designed primarily to facilitate extraction (railway lines connecting agricultural hinterlands to ports for export) rather than internal economic development. The post-independence period saw continuing debates about infrastructure priorities that reflected underlying class interests: whose communities would be connected by roads, whose waterways would be dredged, whose neighborhoods would receive electricity and clean water.

Sikder's awareness of these dimensions of the political economy of infrastructure, derived from his technical training and professional experience, enriched his analysis of the class character of the Pakistani and subsequently Bangladeshi state. He could see, in concrete material terms, how the decisions about where to build roads, which waterways to maintain, which neighborhoods to electrify, reflected and reinforced the class interests of the propertied classes against those of the poor.

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This technically grounded political economy analysis was one of the distinctive contributions of Sikder's theoretical framework to the broader Bangladeshi left. Most leftist political analysis in the tradition he was working in was primarily concerned with production relations (who owns the means of production) and less concerned with the specific technical and infrastructural dimensions of economic power. Sikder's engineering background allowed him to ground his political analysis in a more materially concrete understanding of how the physical infrastructure of society both reflects and reproduces class power.

20.3 The Engineer as Revolutionary: Comparative Perspectives

Sikder is by no means unique among revolutionary figures in his technical educational background. Several of the most significant revolutionary leaders of the twentieth century had scientific or technical training that shaped their approach to revolutionary theory and practice.

Che Guevara was a medical doctor whose understanding of epidemiology and social medicine shaped his analysis of the relationship between poverty and disease and his approach to the role of healthcare in revolutionary social transformation. Mao Zedong, while not a trained scientist, was deeply interested in scientific method and repeatedly insisted that Marxism was a "science" in the sense of providing objectively valid knowledge of social reality. Ho Chi Minh had a wide range of practical technical skills developed through his years of work in many different countries and occupations before becoming a revolutionary leader.

The comparison that is perhaps most structurally similar to Sikder's case is with Camilo Torres Restrepo, the Colombian priest and sociologist who became a revolutionary after concluding that structural change in Colombia could not be achieved through peaceful means, and who was killed in combat with the Colombian military in February 1966. Like Sikder, Torres had a professional background (theology and sociology rather than engineering) that shaped his analysis of the social structure he sought to change, and like Sikder he died young (at thirty-seven) without seeing the revolutionary project he had initiated come to fruition.

The deeper philosophical question raised by the figure of the educated professional turned revolutionary is the question of what drives someone with access to a comfortable middle-class future to choose the dangerous, demanding, and ultimately fatal path of revolutionary commitment. This question, which has fascinated biographers and social psychologists alike, does not have a simple answer. In Sikder's case, the available biographical evidence suggests a combination of intellectual conviction (his genuine belief in the Marxist analysis of social reality and in the imperative of revolutionary change), moral conviction (his genuine commitment to the cause of the poor and oppressed), and personal characteristics (the intensity, the intellectual ambition, the capacity for leadership and for inspiring loyalty in others) that together produced the specific trajectory his life took.

20.4 Engineering, Systems Thinking, and Revolutionary Strategy

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One dimension of Sikder's engineering background that deserves specific attention is what might be called "systems thinking": the ability to understand complex systems as wholes, to identify the relationships between components, to distinguish between symptoms and underlying structural causes, and to think about intervention at the level of the system rather than simply at the level of individual components.

Systems thinking, in this sense, is a key intellectual tool for both engineering and revolutionary political analysis. The engineer who wants to understand why a bridge is failing needs to look at the entire structural system, not just the most visibly damaged component. The revolutionary theorist who wants to understand why poverty persists needs to look at the entire social system, not just the most visible manifestation of that poverty.

Sikder's theoretical framework, which sought to understand East Bengali poverty and exploitation as the product of an interlocking system of imperialism, feudalism, and comprador capitalism rather than as the result of individual bad actors or isolated policy failures, reflects this systems-thinking orientation. His insistence on identifying the "principal contradiction" at each historical stage, the single most important structural tension that determines the overall development of the system, is a form of analytical prioritization that parallels the engineer's identification of the critical failure point in a structural system.

This systems-thinking approach also shaped Sikder's organizational theory. The PBSP's constitution and organizational procedures, with their attention to the relationships between the various levels of the party hierarchy, the mechanisms for democratic centralism, and the processes for internal criticism and self-criticism, reflected an organizational systems designer's concern with building structures that would function reliably under the stress of actual operation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL LEGACY: MARXISM, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE

21.1 Siraj Sikder and the Marxist Tradition: A Philosophical Assessment

The philosophical assessment of Siraj Sikder's relationship to the Marxist tradition requires distinguishing between several different questions: the validity of his specific theoretical analyses, the coherence of his theoretical framework, the adequacy of his adaptation of Marxist theory to Bengali conditions, and the broader questions about Marxism itself that his project raises.

On the first question, the validity of Sikder's specific theoretical analyses, the assessment is mixed. The colonial thesis, as we have analyzed, captured something real and important about the political economy of East Pakistan, even if the analogy with classical colonial relationships was not perfect in every detail. The class analysis of the Awami League, as we have also analyzed, captured something real about the limitations of Bengali bourgeois nationalism as a

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vehicle for genuine social transformation, even if it was sometimes applied with too much theoretical rigidity and too little attention to the specific historical dynamics of the liberation war period.

On the second question, the coherence of his theoretical framework, the assessment is more positive. Sikder's theoretical framework was genuinely coherent in the sense that its components, the colonial thesis, the identification of the principal contradiction, the theory of new democratic revolution, the strategy of protracted people's war, formed a consistent and mutually supporting structure of analysis. One could challenge individual components of this framework (as this textbook has done, particularly in relation to the geographic and social applicability of protracted people's war to East Bengal), but the framework as a whole had a logical consistency that commanded respect even from those who disagreed with its conclusions.

On the third question, the adequacy of the theoretical adaptation to Bengali conditions, the assessment is more critical. The most significant failure of adaptation was in the area of revolutionary strategy, where the application of protracted people's war to the geographical and social conditions of the Bengal delta was not accompanied by adequate analysis of the specific ways in which those conditions differed from the Chinese case for which the strategy was developed, and therefore not accompanied by the necessary strategic adaptations.

On the fourth question, the broader questions about Marxism itself that Sikder's project raises, the assessment opens onto the vast and endlessly debated field of Marxist theory and its relationship to actual revolutionary practice. Three broad questions seem most relevant.

First: is the Marxist theory of historical development, the argument that social formations move through specific stages under the pressure of contradictions between productive forces and relations of production, adequate as a basis for revolutionary political strategy? The evidence from the Bangladesh case, like the evidence from the broader history of Marxist revolutionary movements, suggests both the analytical power of the Marxist framework and its limitations as a guide to the specific tactics and timing of revolutionary action.

Second: is the Leninist theory of the vanguard party, the organizational model adopted by Sikder's PBSP, a viable model for revolutionary organization under conditions of democratic opposition to authoritarian governance? The Bangladesh experience, like the broader twentieth-century history of Leninist organizations, suggests that the vanguard party model has significant organizational strengths (discipline, coherence, capacity for sustained commitment) and significant organizational weaknesses (tendency toward internal authoritarianism, vulnerability to the personality cults of charismatic leaders, difficulty of maintaining genuine mass line practice under conditions of clandestine operation).

Third: is armed revolutionary struggle a viable and morally justifiable strategy for social transformation in the specific conditions of the post-1971 Bangladesh? The PBSP's experience suggests that armed struggle in those conditions was both organizationally difficult to sustain and

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morally problematic in its effects on the political culture of the revolutionary movement and on the civilian communities caught between the guerrillas and the state's counterinsurgency forces.

21.2 Postcolonial Theory and Sikder's Legacy

The relationship between Siraj Sikder's theoretical project and the subsequently developed field of postcolonial theory is a rich area of analysis that this textbook has begun to explore in Part Two and that deserves further development here.

Postcolonial theory, as it has developed since the 1980s in the work of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Chakrabarty, and others, shares with Sikder's Maoist framework a fundamental concern with the persistent effects of colonialism on the social structures, political institutions, and cultural formations of formerly colonized societies. Both traditions insist that formal political independence does not automatically produce genuine social liberation, that the structures of colonial power persist in modified forms even after the formal withdrawal of colonial rule, and that understanding these persistent structures requires theoretical frameworks that go beyond the surface level of political institutions to examine the deeper structures of economic power, cultural formation, and social relations.

But postcolonial theory and the Maoist tradition differ significantly in their specific analytical frameworks, their political priorities, and their prescriptions for action. Postcolonial theory, particularly in its most influential forms, is primarily concerned with questions of culture, representation, and discourse: with the ways in which colonial power operated through specific forms of knowledge, representation, and cultural practice, and with the ways in which postcolonial subjects negotiate their complex positions within the cultural legacy of colonialism. The Maoist tradition, including Sikder's version of it, is primarily concerned with questions of political economy: with the class structures, production relations, and state forms that reproduce exploitation and oppression.

The complementarity of these two analytical traditions is significant. The postcolonial tradition's attention to culture and representation fills a gap in the Maoist framework, which sometimes treats cultural and ideological phenomena as straightforwardly derivative of economic base without adequate attention to the specific ways in which cultural formations have their own dynamics and their own forms of power. The Maoist tradition's attention to political economy and class structure fills a gap in the postcolonial tradition, which sometimes analyzes cultural formations at a level of abstraction that loses sight of the material structures of economic power that produce and sustain them.

The most productive approaches to Sikder's legacy from a theoretical perspective are those that draw on both traditions: using postcolonial theory's sophisticated analysis of colonial knowledge, representation, and cultural power to enrich the Maoist political economy framework, while using the Maoist framework's insistence on class and material structures to ground postcolonial theory's cultural analysis in the specific economic relations that produce both cultural power and cultural resistance.

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21.3 The Question of Violence Revisited: A Philosophical Synthesis

This textbook has analyzed the question of political violence in Sikder's project at several points in the preceding chapters, drawing on philosophical frameworks from Walzer's just war theory to Fanon's colonial violence analysis to Habermas's communicative ethics. In this concluding section, it is appropriate to attempt a philosophical synthesis of these various perspectives in relation to the specific question of Sikder's legacy.

The question is not whether violence is ever justified in political life. The claim that it never is would be implausible: it would require condemning the resistance to Nazi Germany and other similar cases where violence was clearly the only available means of resisting a genocidal power. The more serious question is under what specific conditions, with what constraints, and in pursuit of what ends political violence is morally justifiable.

The philosophical tradition's most developed answer to this question is the just war theory, which specifies a set of conditions for the justification of both the resort to war (jus ad bellum) and the conduct of war (jus in bello). The jus ad bellum conditions include: just cause (the grievance being addressed must be a genuine and serious injustice), right intention (the action must be genuinely directed at remedying the injustice, not at private advantage), proportionality (the violence used must be proportionate to the grievance and to the likely benefits), last resort (all available peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted), and reasonable hope of success (the action must have a realistic chance of achieving its aims).

The jus in bello conditions include: discrimination (force must be directed at legitimate military targets, not at civilians or non-combatants) and proportionality in the conduct of the war (the specific acts of violence must not cause civilian harm disproportionate to the military advantage achieved).

Applying this framework to Sikder's revolutionary project produces a mixed assessment. On the jus ad bellum criteria: the just cause criterion is satisfied in the case of the liberation war against Pakistan (fighting against genocide and colonial rule) but is more debatable in the case of the post-independence armed struggle against the Awami League government (where the grievances, though real, were not of the same existential character). The last resort criterion is more problematic for the post-independence phase: it is not clear that all available peaceful alternatives had been exhausted before the decision to move to armed struggle against the Awami League government. The reasonable hope of success criterion is the most clearly unmet: the organizational and tactical conditions for successful armed struggle against the Awami League government were not present in 1972, as the subsequent history demonstrated.

On the jus in bello criteria: the PBSP's actions against Razakars and collaborators during the liberation war can be assessed more charitably than its subsequent actions against landlords and moneylenders who, whatever their class position, were not combatants in any meaningful military sense. The internal proceedings against accused traitors, which in some cases resulted in death, violated the discrimination criterion regardless of how serious the accusation of betrayal

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was, since the procedures used to assess the accusation were inadequate to establish guilt to a standard that would justify the ultimate sanction.

The philosophical synthesis that this analysis suggests is: there is a meaningful distinction to be made between the PBSP's armed resistance during the liberation war phase (which can be partially justified within a just war framework, given the genocidal character of the Pakistani military's violence) and the PBSP's post-independence armed struggle against the Awami League government (which cannot be fully justified within a just war framework, given the absence of adequate just cause and the absence of a reasonable hope of success). This distinction does not require either blanket condemnation or blanket justification of the PBSP's use of violence: it requires the specific analytical work of assessing different uses of violence in different historical contexts according to the relevant moral criteria.

21.4 Justice Deferred: The Fifty-Year Legacy and Contemporary Claims

The fiftieth anniversary of Siraj Sikder's death, observed in January 2025 in the specific political context of post-uprising Bangladesh, provides a powerful vantage point from which to assess the claims that his legacy makes on the present.

The most immediate claim is a legal one: the claim for an investigation into the circumstances of Sikder's death and accountability for those responsible. This is not merely a retrospective demand: it is a demand with contemporary relevance for the principle of the rule of law in Bangladesh. If Bangladesh in 2025 is genuinely committed to constitutionalism, to the protection of fundamental rights, and to accountability for state violence, then the unresolved killing of Sikder in 1975 is a standing challenge to those commitments.

The political history of Bangladesh includes other cases of accountability for past political killings: the prosecution and execution of the officers responsible for the August 1975 coup and the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family, which was finally accomplished in 2010. The legal proceedings in that case, whatever their specific procedural limitations, established the principle that political killings cannot be permanently shielded from legal accountability. The application of this principle to the killing of Siraj Sikder would require reopening a historical wound that has never been properly addressed.

The second major claim is a political one: the claim that the questions Sikder raised about class power, the nature of the postcolonial state, and the relationship between formal democracy and genuine social justice remain unresolved in contemporary Bangladesh. The July 2024 uprising, which overthrew an authoritarian government that had ruled for fifteen years through electoral manipulation and political repression, did not resolve these questions: it opened a new political moment in which they are being actively contested. The specific answers that Sikder proposed, the new democratic revolution, the protracted people's war, the vanguard party of the proletariat, may or may not be adequate to the conditions of the 2020s. But the questions themselves, about who benefits from the Bangladeshi state, whose interests its institutions serve, and what genuine social transformation would require, are as relevant now as they were in 1971.

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The third claim is a theoretical one: the claim that Sikder's intellectual legacy, including his colonial thesis, his class analysis of the Bengali social formation, his adaptation of Maoist theory to South Asian conditions, and his theoretical writings on the relationship between national liberation and social revolution, constitutes a contribution to the political theory of postcolonial societies that deserves serious scholarly engagement rather than either uncritical celebration or dismissal.

This claim is the one that this textbook has sought to take most seriously. The engagement with Sikder's theoretical writings throughout this work has proceeded on the assumption that they contain genuine analytical insights that deserve to be assessed on their merits rather than simply accepted or rejected on the basis of ideological alignment. The assessment has been critical as well as appreciative: it has identified both the genuine contributions and the genuine limitations of Sikder's theoretical framework. But it has proceeded on the conviction that the engagement itself is worthwhile, that Sikder's theoretical work illuminates important questions about colonial history, class power, political economy, and revolutionary strategy that continue to demand analytical attention.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: THE MUJIB GOVERNMENT, STATE VIOLENCE, AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER: A JURISPRUDENTIAL ANALYSIS

22.1 The 1972 Constitution and Its Revolutionary Promise

The Constitution of Bangladesh promulgated in November 1972 was, by the standards of its time and place, a remarkably progressive constitutional document. Written rapidly by a constituent assembly that was simultaneously the parliament of the new state, the constitution established a parliamentary system of government, affirmed an extensive list of fundamental rights, and incorporated four "state principles" (nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism) that reflected the ideals of the liberation movement.

The fundamental rights chapter of the 1972 constitution (Articles 26 to 47) protected a wide range of civil and political rights: equality before the law (Article 27), freedom of thought, conscience, and speech (Article 39), freedom of assembly and association (Article 37), freedom of movement (Article 36), and the right to life and personal liberty (Article 31). Article 35 provided protection against retrospective criminal legislation, against torture and cruel treatment, and against self-incrimination.

The constitution also incorporated provisions for the social and economic rights of workers and peasants: Article 14 committed the state to the emancipation of "toiling masses of peasants and workers," Article 15 established as a fundamental principle the state's obligation to ensure the basic necessities of life, and Article 20 declared that work was a right and a duty. These social and economic commitments were framed as "fundamental principles of state policy" rather than directly justiciable rights, meaning that they could not be directly enforced through litigation, but

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they represented significant constitutional commitments that spoke to the ideals of the liberation struggle.

For the PBSP, the 1972 constitution was an interesting and ambivalent document. On one hand, many of its formal commitments aligned with the PBSP's own programme: the commitments to equality, to the emancipation of workers and peasants, to secularism, were all consistent with the PBSP's political values. On the other hand, the constitution established the Awami League government as the legitimate government of Bangladesh, organized on a parliamentary basis that gave the Awami League's electoral majority the authority to govern, which meant that the PBSP's armed challenge to that government was, under the constitution, criminal rather than politically legitimate.

The PBSP's response to this situation was, of course, that constitutional legitimacy in a class society is not genuinely democratic legitimacy: that a constitution that protects private property, that does not provide for the genuine democratic control of the economy by the working class and peasantry, and that was drafted and adopted by a parliament dominated by the bourgeois Awami League, is not a genuinely democratic constitution whatever its formal provisions may say. This is a theoretically defensible position, but it is also a position that, if accepted without further qualification, effectively denies the authority of any constitutional order that does not fully embody the revolutionary programme, a conclusion that has deeply problematic implications for the possibility of any form of legal order under conditions of transitional politics.

22.2 The Erosion of Constitutional Rights: Emergency Powers and the Rakkhi Bahini

The gap between the 1972 constitution's formal commitments and the actual practice of the Mujib government in the areas of security and political rights is one of the most important dimensions of the political history of the period. Examining this gap systematically provides the jurisprudential framework for understanding both the specific violations of which Sikder's killing was the most extreme example and the broader pattern of authoritarian governance that the PBSP was opposing.

The Emergency Powers Ordinance promulgated in December 1974 gave the government sweeping powers to suspend fundamental rights and to detain individuals without judicial oversight. The Ordinance was formally within the constitutional framework, since Article 141 of the constitution authorized the proclamation of a state of emergency under specified conditions. But the use of emergency powers to suppress political opposition that was not posing a genuine existential threat to the constitutional order represented an abuse of the emergency power framework that most constitutional theorists would regard as outside the spirit of constitutional emergency provisions.

The jurisprudential analysis of emergency powers is a well-developed field that has been significantly enriched by the work of scholars including Kim Lane Scheppele ("The International State of Exception," 2006), Oren Gross and Fionnuala Ni Aolain ("Law in Times of Crisis,"

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2006), and more recently the extensive scholarship produced in connection with the post-September 11 security environment. This scholarship distinguishes between legitimate emergency powers (necessary and proportionate responses to genuine existential threats) and illegitimate emergency powers (the use of emergency frameworks to suppress political opposition under the cover of security justification).

The Mujib government's use of emergency powers falls more clearly into the second category than the first. The PBSP's armed campaign, though real and sometimes violent, did not pose a genuine existential threat to the Bangladeshi state. The government's response, deploying the Rakkhi Bahini with its extrajudicial methods and suspending fundamental rights through emergency legislation, was disproportionate to the actual security threat and served primarily to suppress political opposition more broadly than merely the PBSP's armed activities.

22.3 BAKSAL as Constitutional Transformation: Legitimacy, Process, and Democratic Theory

The introduction of BAKSAL through the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution in January 1975 is one of the most significant events in the constitutional history of Bangladesh, and its jurisprudential analysis is directly relevant to the broader question of the Mujib government's relationship to constitutionalism and democracy.

The Fourth Amendment transformed the constitutional order in several fundamental ways. First, it established a presidential system, concentrating executive power in the hands of the president (who was, of course, Mujib). Second, it established the Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BAKSAL) as the sole authorized political party, prohibiting all other political parties. Third, it restructured the judiciary to reduce judicial independence and to increase executive control over the judicial appointments process. Fourth, it gave the president essentially unlimited power to legislate by decree during the parliamentary recess.

The formal constitutional process for these amendments was technically complied with: the Fourth Amendment was passed by the requisite majority in parliament. But the substantive constitutionalism analysis, which asks not merely whether constitutional forms were observed but whether the constitutional order's fundamental commitments to democracy, rights, and the rule of law were maintained, leads to a very different assessment.

The constitutional theorist Yaniv Roznai, in his influential work "Unconstitutional Constitutional Amendments" (2017), develops the theory that certain constitutional amendments are constitutionally illegitimate even if they comply with the formal amendment procedures, because they strike at the "constitutional identity" of the constitution, the core elements that define its fundamental character as a constitutional order. Applied to the Fourth Amendment, this framework suggests that the amendment was constitutionally illegitimate because it replaced the democratic, multi-party constitutional order with a single-party presidential system that fundamentally contradicted the democratic and rights-protective constitutional identity established by the 1972 constitution.

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The PBSP's response to BAKSAL, which was to characterize it as the full emergence of fascism by the comprador bourgeoisie, was politically polemical rather than jurisprudentially sophisticated. But the underlying analytical point, that BAKSAL represented a fundamental departure from constitutional democracy, was correct.

22.4 The Broader Pattern: Authoritarian Governance and Constitutional Erosion in South Asia

The Mujib government's trajectory from progressive constitutionalism to BAKSAL authoritarianism is not unique in South Asian political history. It reflects a broader pattern that has been observed across the region and that has important theoretical implications.

India under Indira Gandhi experienced a similar trajectory in the 1970s: the Emergency declared in June 1975, which suspended democratic rights and gave Gandhi essentially dictatorial powers, was imposed just months after Sikder's killing and BAKSAL's introduction. The structural parallels between Gandhi's Emergency and Mujib's BAKSAL are striking: both were responses to political crises by elected leaders who used the authority of the democratic state to suspend democracy. Both were justified by their architects on grounds of national security and development necessity. And both ultimately failed: the Emergency ended in 1977 when Gandhi called elections and lost, and BAKSAL ended with Mujib's assassination in August 1975.

The theoretical framework of "democratic backsliding," developed in the comparative politics literature of the 2010s and 2020s by scholars such as Nancy Bermeo ("On Democratic Backsliding," 2016), Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way ("Competitive Authoritarianism," 2010), and more recently Anna Grzymala-Busse and others, provides analytical tools for understanding the BAKSAL episode within a broader comparative framework of the ways in which democratically elected governments can undermine democratic institutions through constitutional means.

Applied to the Bangladesh case, the democratic backsliding framework would characterize BAKSAL not as a sudden coup but as the culmination of a gradual process of democratic erosion: the progressive weakening of independent institutions, the use of emergency powers to suppress political opposition, the tolerance of security force abuses, and the increasing concentration of political power in the Awami League's hands, which had been proceeding throughout the 1972 to 1975 period before the formal constitutional transformation of January 1975.

The relevance of this analysis for understanding the PBSP's political situation is significant. The PBSP had been fighting against a government that was simultaneously claiming democratic legitimacy (through its 1970 electoral mandate) and engaging in progressive democratic erosion. This ambiguous political character of the target, a formally democratic government that was undermining democracy in practice, was one of the factors that made the PBSP's political positioning difficult and that complicated its attempts to build a broader political coalition against the government.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: THE FINAL RECKONING: WHAT DID SIKDER ACHIEVE?

23.1 The Question of Revolutionary Success and Failure

The assessment of revolutionary success and failure is one of the most complex analytical problems in the study of political history. Simple assessments based on whether the revolution achieved its stated goals are inadequate, because they ignore the ways in which revolutionary movements can achieve important things even when they fail to win state power, and the ways in which successful seizures of state power can fail to achieve the social transformations they promised.

For the PBSP's specific revolutionary project, the immediate assessment must acknowledge genuine failure: the party did not achieve its goal of a new democratic revolution, did not establish a People's Democratic Republic of East Bengal, did not fundamentally transform the class structure of Bangladesh, and was effectively destroyed as a functional revolutionary organization within a few years of its founder's death. On the most straightforward metric of revolutionary success (did the revolution win?), the answer is no.

But this immediate assessment needs to be supplemented by a more complex analysis of what the PBSP's project achieved in other dimensions. The party created a significant body of theoretical work that contributed to the analysis of Bangladesh's political economy and that has continued to influence left political thought in Bangladesh to the present day. It organized significant numbers of people in the rural poor communities of the southern delta and elsewhere, building political consciousness and organizational capacity in communities that were otherwise largely excluded from formal political life. It conducted a sustained challenge to the political hegemony of the Awami League in the immediate post-independence period, demonstrating that the political landscape of Bangladesh was more contested than the Awami League's overwhelming electoral majority suggested.

And, perhaps most importantly for the long-term historical assessment, the PBSP's existence and activities kept alive the question of class and social transformation in Bangladeshi politics at a moment when the dominant tendency was toward the absorption of the liberation war's revolutionary energy into a nationalist politics that served primarily bourgeois interests. By insisting that the liberation war's promise had not been fulfilled, that the independence of Bangladesh did not resolve the fundamental questions of justice and exploitation, and that a genuinely emancipatory politics required going beyond the Awami League's programme, the PBSP maintained a crucial critical counterpoint to the dominant political narrative.

23.2 The Theoretical Contribution: What Endures?

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If we ask what theoretical contribution Siraj Sikder made that endures, beyond the organizational failures and the organizational violence, the answer is significant and should not be underestimated.

His colonial thesis, adapted to the post-independence context as a critique of the comprador character of the Bangladeshi state, established an analytical framework for understanding the class dynamics of Bangladeshi politics that has been validated in broad outline by the subsequent political history. The persistence of elite capture of state resources, the subordination of the interests of the rural poor to those of the urban propertied classes, and the accommodation of Bangladeshi governments (both Awami League and BNP) to the interests of international capital at the expense of workers and peasants, are patterns that Sikder's class analysis predicted and that the historical record has confirmed.

His theory of the unfinished revolution, the argument that national independence without social transformation leaves the fundamental structures of exploitation intact, is a contribution to the theoretical literature of postcolonial politics that has been independently reached by scholars working in very different theoretical traditions. The postcolonial theoretical insight that formal decolonization reproduces rather than eliminates colonial power structures is, in its political economy dimensions, essentially the same as Sikder's argument about the comprador character of the postcolonial state.

His insistence on the centrality of the land question, the argument that genuine social transformation in Bangladesh required a fundamental redistribution of land from landlords to the landless, addressed the most fundamental structural problem of rural poverty in Bangladesh. Subsequent development economics research has consistently confirmed the centrality of land access to rural poverty outcomes, and the failure of successive Bangladeshi governments to implement meaningful land reform has validated the PBSP's prediction that a bourgeois government would not address this fundamental structural problem.

23.3 The Ethical Legacy: A Politics of Solidarity with the Most Oppressed

Whatever the organizational failures and moral problems associated with the PBSP's history, and this textbook has been honest about both, there is a dimension of Sikder's political project that deserves to be acknowledged and affirmed: its genuine commitment to the interests of those who are most oppressed and most excluded from political power.

The political tradition in which Sikder worked identified the sarbahara, the proletarian, those who have nothing, as the central moral and political subject of revolutionary politics. This identification was not merely rhetorical. The PBSP's organizational work in the Barisal delta, whatever its failures and limitations, was genuinely directed at the poorest and most exploited members of rural Bangladesh: the landless laborers, the indebted sharecroppers, the marginalized and the dispossessed. The party's cadres, living in poverty and danger alongside the communities they sought to organize, were not cynically using the poor for political purposes but were genuinely trying to build a politics from and for the most excluded.

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This commitment to the most oppressed, to those who are "below" even the working class in terms of their access to resources and political voice, is a political value that transcends the specific organizational and strategic choices of the PBSP. It is a value that speaks directly to the enduring reality of extreme poverty and exclusion in Bangladesh and across the global South, and that demands political engagement regardless of one's specific assessment of the PBSP's organizational model or strategic choices.

The political philosopher Michael Walzer has argued, in "Spheres of Justice" and subsequent work, that the most fundamental requirement of a just political order is that it takes seriously the interests and the dignity of all its members, not merely those who have the power to make their interests felt in normal political processes. Sikder's politics, with all its failures and contradictions, was animated by precisely this commitment: the insistence that the interests of the most marginal and most exploited must be central to any genuinely just politics.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF KEY EVENTS IN PART THREE

Late December 1974: Siraj Sikder arrested at Hali Shahar, Chittagong

January 1 or 2, 1975: Siraj Sikder killed while in state custody, on the road from Dhaka's Tejgaon airport to the Rakkhi Bahini camp at Savar

Early January 1975: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivers parliamentary speech asking "Where is Siraj Sikder?" and celebrating news of his death

January 25, 1975: Introduction of BAKSAL; Fourth Amendment to the Constitution; single-party presidential system established

August 15, 1975: Military coup; assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family; dissolution of BAKSAL; Rakkhi Bahini dissolved

1975 to 1977: Period of acute internal crisis in the PBSP following Sikder's death; internal violence among surviving party factions

1977: Md. Hamidul Hoque assumes effective leadership of the major PBSP faction; Anwarul Kabir begins long tenure as party general secretary

1972 to present: Annual January 2 commemorations of Sikder's death by surviving party organizations and left sympathizers

2024: PBSP holds its Fifth Party Congress under Anwarul Kabir's chairmanship

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August 5, 2024: Mass uprising topples Sheikh Hasina's government; opening of new political moment in Bangladesh in which Sikder's legacy is actively debated

January 2025: Fiftieth anniversary commemorations of Sikder's death in the context of post-uprising Bangladesh; renewed scholarly and political interest in his legacy

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APPENDIX B: THE QUESTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY: LEGAL OPTIONS AND MORAL IMPERATIVES

B.1 Transitional Justice Mechanisms and the Bangladesh Case

The concept of transitional justice, as developed in scholarship and practice since the 1990s, encompasses a range of mechanisms through which societies attempt to address the legacies of past human rights violations during periods of political transition. These mechanisms include criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programmes, institutional reform, and various forms of symbolic acknowledgment such as official apologies and commemorations.

The July 2024 uprising and the subsequent political transition in Bangladesh have created a context in which transitional justice mechanisms are under active discussion. The interim government has established bodies to investigate the violence of the Hasina period, and various civil society organizations have called for broader truth-telling processes about the full history of political violence in Bangladesh, including the violence of the early independence period.

The specific question of accountability for Siraj Sikder's killing is a subset of this broader transitional justice question. Prosecutorial accountability in the strict sense is no longer possible: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed in 1975, and the other political figures of the period who might have borne responsibility are mostly dead. But there are other forms of accountability that remain possible and that are supported by the transitional justice literature.

Truth-telling accountability, through a formal investigation that establishes the facts about the circumstances of Sikder's killing, the chain of authorization, and the cover-up that followed, is still possible and historically valuable. Even without criminal prosecution, establishing an authoritative factual record serves important purposes: it provides justice-in-truth for the victim and his family, it contributes to the historical record, and it creates a precedent that extrajudicial killing cannot be permanently concealed or justified.

Symbolic accountability, through official recognition of the injustice of Sikder's killing and acknowledgment of the constitutional violations it represented, is a form of accountability that has been used in various transitional justice contexts and that can be meaningful even in the absence of criminal prosecution.

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Structural reform, including the strengthening of legal mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of extrajudicial killing and custodial death, is the most important form of forward-looking accountability. The creation of an independent body to investigate deaths in police custody, the strengthening of habeas corpus protections, and the creation of an independent prosecutor's office with authority to investigate state agents are all reforms that the historical record of the 1970s, including Sikder's killing, supports.

B.2 The Human Rights Law Framework for Accountability

The human rights law framework for accountability for past extrajudicial killings is well established, though its application to events that occurred before Bangladesh became a party to the main international human rights treaties is technically complex.

The UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (General Assembly Resolution 60/147, 2005) establish the rights of victims to an effective remedy (including access to justice), to know the truth, and to receive reparation. These principles apply to violations of the human rights norms that were already established in customary international law at the time of the violation, even before a state becomes formally party to specific treaty obligations.

The right to know the truth is particularly relevant for the Bangladesh case. The UN Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment 36 on the right to life under the ICCPR, has established that states have an obligation to investigate deaths caused by their agents, and that families of victims have the right to know the truth about what happened. The persistent false narrative about Sikder's "attempted escape," which has never been officially retracted, violates this right to truth.

APPENDIX C: KEY THEORETICAL CONCEPTS INTRODUCED IN PART THREE

Command responsibility: The doctrine of international criminal law establishing that military and civilian commanders may be held legally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates if they knew or should have known of those crimes and failed to prevent or punish them.

Constitutional identity: The concept, developed in comparative constitutional theory, that constitutions have a core identity, a set of fundamental commitments, that cannot be altered through the normal amendment process without destroying the constitutional order itself.

Custodial death: Death occurring while a person is in the custody of state agents. International human rights law imposes specific obligations on states with respect to the investigation and accountability of custodial deaths.

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Democratic backsliding: The gradual erosion of democratic institutions and practices by formally elected governments, through a combination of legal changes, institutional capture, and the suppression of political opposition.

Impunity: The failure of states to investigate and prosecute those responsible for human rights violations, which creates conditions in which those violations are likely to recur.

Just war theory: The philosophical tradition, developed from Aquinas through Grotius and Walzer, that specifies conditions under which the resort to war and the conduct of war can be morally justified.

Political martyrdom: The transformation of a person who dies for a political cause into a symbol that continues to generate political meaning and to motivate political action after their death.

Redemptive remembrance: Walter Benjamin's concept of the obligation of historical memory to preserve the experience and the claims of the defeated and the forgotten, against the historicist tendency to understand history solely through the lens of what survived and triumphed.

Right to truth: The right recognized in international human rights law for victims and their families to know the full facts about human rights violations committed against them.

Transitional justice: The field of theory and practice concerned with mechanisms through which societies address the legacies of past human rights violations during periods of political transition.

Unconstitutional constitutional amendment: The theoretical concept that certain constitutional amendments, though formally complying with the amendment procedure, are substantively unconstitutional because they destroy the fundamental democratic or rights-protective character of the constitutional order.

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End of Part Three

Part Four: "Siraj Sikder's Theoretical Legacy: Maoism, Postcolonialism, and the Political Theory of South Asian Revolution" will follow.

A Note on Sources and Methodology for Part Three

Part Three has drawn extensively on the available historical sources about the circumstances of Siraj Sikder's death, while being transparent about the significant gaps and uncertainties in the historical record. The most detailed accounts of the final months of Sikder's life and the circumstances of his arrest and death come from Mohiuddin Ahmad's "Lal Shontrash" and from Anthony Mascarenhas's "Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood." Both of these sources are valuable but need to be used critically, as they rely in part on the accounts of individuals with complex relationships to the events they describe.

The jurisprudential and philosophical analysis in this Part draws on the major works of international human rights law, transitional justice theory, political philosophy, and constitutional theory cited in the bibliography. Where these theoretical frameworks are applied to the specific Bangladesh case, the application is the author's own scholarly judgment rather than established legal precedent, since there has never been a formal legal proceeding in which the circumstances of Sikder's death have been adjudicated.

The contemporary dimensions of this Part, including the analysis of the July 2024 uprising and the January 2025 commemorations, draw on the online sources cited in the bibliography and on the author's engagement with the broader scholarly and political discussion of Sikder's legacy that these events generated. The political moment in Bangladesh remains fluid as of the writing of this textbook, and the specific institutional and political outcomes of the post-uprising transition are not yet fully determined.

PART FOUR: SIRAJ SIKDER'S THEORETICAL LEGACY: MAOISM, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND THE POLITICAL THEORY OF SOUTH ASIAN REVOLUTION

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Preface to Part Four

Parts One through Three of this textbook have traced the biographical, historical, and jurisprudential dimensions of Siraj Sikder's life, from the deep colonial roots of Bengali society through his revolutionary formation, the founding of the Sarbahara Party, the liberation war and its aftermath, and the violent circumstances of his death. Part Three concluded with the immediate organizational consequences of his killing, the fragmentation of the PBSP, and a preliminary philosophical assessment of his legacy.

Part Four turns from the biographical and historical to the theoretical and comparative. Its central question is: what does Siraj Sikder's intellectual project mean for the broader enterprise of political theory, revolutionary thought, and the study of postcolonial states and societies? This question has multiple dimensions. There is a question about the validity and continuing relevance of his specific theoretical contributions, his colonial thesis, his class analysis of the Bengali social formation, his adaptation of Mao's framework to South Asian conditions. There is a question about the place of his thought within the broader history of revolutionary Marxist theory, specifically in relation to the global Maoist movement and its theoretical debates. There is a question about the relationship between his theoretical framework and the subsequently developed field of postcolonial theory, a relationship of convergence and tension that has not been adequately examined in the existing scholarship. There is a question about what the specific failure of his revolutionary project tells us about the conditions of revolutionary possibility in postcolonial societies more broadly. And there is a question about the contemporary relevance of his theoretical legacy in the specific context of post-uprising Bangladesh in 2025 and 2026.

This Part addresses all of these questions through a combination of close reading of Sikder's primary theoretical texts, comparative analysis of global Maoist theory and practice, engagement with postcolonial and decolonial theoretical traditions, and attention to the most recent scholarly developments in the fields of political theory, revolutionary studies, and South Asian studies. The goal is not to produce a definitive or closed assessment but to provide the analytical frameworks and theoretical vocabulary through which the reader can engage with these questions seriously and independently.

Part Four is organized thematically rather than chronologically, examining the major theoretical dimensions of Sikder's legacy in sequence: his theory of colonialism and the postcolonial state, his class analysis and its relationship to contemporary political economy, his organizational theory and the question of vanguard politics, his strategic theory and its relationship to the geography of revolution, his relationship to global Maoism and its contemporary debates, his relationship to postcolonial and decolonial theory, and his relevance for contemporary Bangladesh and the broader South Asian left. Each of these dimensions is examined in light of the most current theoretical scholarship, including work from 2024, 2025, and 2026.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: THE THEORY OF COLONIALISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE: SIKDER'S COLONIAL THESIS IN CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

24.1 The Colonial Thesis Revisited: Analytical Foundations and Contemporary Relevance

The foundational analytical claim of Siraj Sikder's theoretical project, articulated first in the 1968 EBWM thesis and developed in subsequent writings, was that East Bengal stood in a colonial relationship to Pakistan. This claim, which we have analyzed in its historical dimensions in Parts One and Two, deserves renewed examination from the perspective of contemporary theoretical developments in postcolonial studies, decolonial theory, and the political economy of the global South.

The core of the colonial thesis was structural rather than merely metaphorical. Sikder was not using "colonial" as a rhetorical intensifier, a way of saying that Pakistani rule over East Bengal was very bad. He was making a specific analytical claim about the nature of the political-economic relationship: that the mechanisms through which resources were extracted from East Bengal to benefit West Pakistan, through which the Bengali majority was denied democratic self-governance, through which Bengali culture was subordinated to Urdu, and through which the coercive apparatus of the Pakistani military was deployed to maintain this order against Bengali resistance, replicated in all essential features the structure of a colonial relationship between a metropolitan power and its colony.

This analytical claim has been contested and affirmed by different scholars, and the contest is genuinely interesting from a theoretical perspective. The critics of the colonial thesis point out that Pakistan was not a foreign power in the classical colonial sense: both wings of Pakistan were formally part of the same sovereign state, the rulers of East Bengal were technically their fellow citizens rather than aliens, and the religious dimension (both wings were Muslim-majority) complicated the straightforward colonizer-colonized binary that classical colonial analysis assumed. These are substantive objections that cannot simply be dismissed.

The defenders of the colonial thesis, including Sikder himself in his "Exposure" document, responded that the formal features of sovereignty (shared citizenship, shared religion) do not determine the substantive character of a political-economic relationship. The substantive features, systematic resource transfer from one region to another, denial of democratic representation, cultural domination, and military coercion to maintain the whole arrangement, define a colonial relationship regardless of the formal characteristics of the political unit within which the relationship is embedded. In this substantive sense, the relationship between East and West Pakistan had all of the features of colonialism.

The contemporary theoretical literature on internal colonialism provides important analytical support for the substantive dimension of Sikder's colonial thesis. The concept of internal colonialism, developed in the 1960s and 1970s by scholars including Michael Hechter (in the context of Celtic peripheries within the British state), Pablo Gonzalez Casanova (in the context

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of Mexican regional inequalities), and Robert Blauner (in the context of African American urban communities), refers to a relationship within a formally unified state in which a dominant ethnic, regional, or national group systematically exploits and subordinates a weaker group through a combination of economic extraction, political exclusion, and cultural domination. The concept of internal colonialism was designed precisely to capture the situation that Sikder identified: colonial-type relationships that exist within the formal borders of a single state.

The most significant recent development in the theory of internal colonialism that is relevant for Sikder's colonial thesis is the work of Adom Getachew, particularly her 2019 book "Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination." Getachew argues that the anticolonial statesmen of the postwar period, including figures like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Eric Williams, and Michael Manley, understood self-determination not merely as formal political independence but as the restructuring of international economic and political orders to eliminate the structural conditions of domination. This expansive conception of self-determination, which Getachew calls "worldmaking," provides a theoretical framework for understanding Sikder's insistence that genuine national liberation from Pakistan required more than formal independence: it required the structural transformation of the political economy that had produced and sustained the colonial relationship.

The specific application of Getachew's framework to the Bangladesh case illuminates both the strengths and the limitations of Sikder's colonial thesis. The strength is the recognition that formal political independence, without structural economic transformation, cannot fully resolve the conditions of colonial subordination: the pattern of resource extraction, dependent development, and external domination can persist through different institutional forms. The limitation, which Getachew's framework also helps to illuminate, is the difficulty of specifying what institutional forms would genuinely produce the structural transformation required. Sikder's answer, a People's Democratic Republic under proletarian leadership implementing land reform, nationalization of major industries, and independence from all imperialist powers, was programmatically clear but organizationally impossible to achieve given the actual balance of political and military forces.

24.2 The Comprador State: Theory, Evidence, and Contemporary Application

The most important theoretical concept through which Sikder analyzed the post-independence Bangladeshi state was the concept of the comprador bourgeoisie and the comprador state. This concept, borrowed from the Maoist tradition's political economy vocabulary, characterized the ruling class and the state it controlled as an intermediary for foreign capital rather than an independent national economic force.

The theoretical genealogy of the comprador concept is worth tracing carefully. The term "comprador" derives from a Portuguese word meaning "buyer" or "purchasing agent," and it was historically applied to the local Chinese merchants who served as intermediaries between foreign trading companies and the Chinese interior market. Lenin developed it into a theoretical category in his analysis of imperialism, distinguishing between the "comprador bourgeoisie" (local

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capitalists serving as intermediaries for imperialist capital) and the "national bourgeoisie" (local capitalists engaged in independent productive activity who had some interest in national economic development). This distinction was central to Mao Zedong's class analysis of China and to his theory of the united front: the national bourgeoisie could be a potential ally of the revolution (against both imperialism and the comprador bourgeoisie), while the comprador bourgeoisie was an ally of imperialism and therefore an enemy of the revolution.

Sikder's application of this distinction to the post-independence Bangladeshi state was theoretically sophisticated but empirically contestable in some of its specific claims. The specific claim that the Awami League government was a comprador government dependent on Indian and international capital was analytically useful as a pointer to the real constraints on the government's ability to pursue genuinely independent development policies. But the characterization of the entire Bangladeshi bourgeoisie as comprador, without adequate attention to the possibility that some fractions of the national bourgeoisie had interests in independent development that differentiated them from pure compradors, was an oversimplification that could distort strategic analysis.

The contemporary political economy scholarship on the Bangladeshi state and its relationship to international capital provides important material for evaluating Sikder's comprador thesis in retrospect. The dramatic growth of Bangladesh's garment industry from the 1980s onwards, which made Bangladesh one of the world's largest garment exporters and provided employment to millions of women workers, is a case that both confirms and complicates the comprador analysis. The garment industry is in many respects a textbook example of comprador capitalism: Bangladeshi manufacturers serve as intermediaries for international retail chains, adding manufacturing value while the design, marketing, and retail profit accrues primarily to foreign corporations. The labor relations within the industry, characterized by very low wages, dangerous working conditions (illustrated by disasters such as the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse which killed over 1,100 workers), and systematic suppression of independent trade unions, reflect the class relations that the comprador model predicts.

At the same time, the garment industry's contribution to Bangladesh's aggregate economic development, including the substantial growth in female workforce participation and the foreign exchange earnings that funded broader development expenditure, complicates a purely extractive characterization. This complexity does not refute the comprador analysis but requires its supplementation with a more differentiated account of the specific forms through which comprador capitalism produces development for some while maintaining exploitation for the many.

The most recent scholarship on Bangladesh's political economy, including work by economists such as Mustafizur Rahman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue and the team of researchers associated with the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, has documented in considerable empirical detail the structures of elite capture of the Bangladeshi state and economy that Sikder's class analysis pointed toward. Their research shows the persistence of a rent-seeking political economy in which economic opportunities are allocated through political

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connections rather than competitive markets, in which the wealth of the politically connected elite has grown dramatically while the wages and working conditions of ordinary workers have lagged far behind, and in which the formal development of Bangladeshi institutions conceals a systematic bias toward the interests of the propertied against those of the poor.

24.3 Neo-Colonialism, Dependency Theory, and the Structural Legacy

Sikder's colonial and comprador thesis has important connections with the tradition of dependency theory and neo-colonialism analysis that developed in Latin America and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, roughly contemporaneous with his own theoretical work. Examining these connections enriches the analysis of both Sikder's specific claims and the broader theoretical tradition within which they can be located.

Dependency theory, as developed by economists and sociologists including Andre Gunder Frank, Celso Furtado, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Enzo Faletto, argued that the underdevelopment of the global periphery was not a stage on the road to development (as modernization theory claimed) but the direct product of the peripheral economies' incorporation into a world capitalist system that structured their development to serve the interests of the metropolitan core. Development in the periphery was "dependent development": it occurred on terms set by and ultimately serving the interests of the metropolitan core, and the structural position of peripheral economies in the world system was one of permanent disadvantage rather than gradually convergent development.

Walter Rodney's "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" (1972), published just one year after Bangladesh's independence and one of the most powerful applications of dependency theory to a specific case, provided an analysis of African underdevelopment as the direct product of European colonialism that parallels Sikder's analysis of East Bengal's underdevelopment as the product of Pakistani colonialism and, in the post-independence period, of its structural dependence on international capital. Both analyses insisted that the poverty of the peripheral region was not a natural condition or a product of internal cultural or institutional failures but a structural outcome of the specific ways in which the peripheral economy had been integrated into a broader system of exploitation.

The subsequent theoretical development of dependency theory and world-systems analysis, particularly in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin, provided more elaborate theoretical frameworks for the kind of structural analysis that Sikder was attempting. Wallerstein's world-systems theory, with its distinction between core, semi-periphery, and periphery positions in the world capitalist system, and its analysis of the mechanisms through which core-periphery inequalities are reproduced across long historical periods, provides a useful conceptual vocabulary for understanding the structural position that Sikder was analyzing at the regional (intra-Pakistan) and then the international (Bangladesh-world system) levels.

The most important recent development in this theoretical tradition that is relevant for Sikder's legacy is the work of scholars such as Jason Hickel, whose "The Divide: Global Inequality from

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Conquest to Free Markets" (2017) and "Less Is More" (2020) have updated the dependency-theory analysis of global wealth transfer with detailed quantitative evidence of the continuing flow of resources from the global South to the global North through the mechanisms of financial flows, unfavorable terms of trade, and debt service. Hickel's calculation that the global South transfers net resources to the global North to the tune of trillions of dollars annually provides a quantitative foundation for the kind of structural analysis that Sikder was attempting at the regional level in the 1960s and 1970s.

24.4 The Decolonial Turn: Mignolo, Quijano, and the Limits of the Marxist Framework

The most significant theoretical development in the field of anti-colonial and postcolonial scholarship since the 1990s has been the emergence of what is called "decolonial theory," associated primarily with Latin American scholars including Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and the broader Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) research network. This theoretical development has important implications for understanding the relationship between Sikder's theoretical project and the contemporary landscape of anti-colonial thought.

Decolonial theory shares with Sikder's Maoist framework a fundamental concern with the continuing effects of colonial domination on formerly colonized societies. But it differs from the Maoist framework in several important ways. Decolonial theory's primary analytical focus is on what Quijano called the "coloniality of power," the pattern of social classification based on race that was established by European colonialism and that persists in modified forms in the postcolonial world, structuring social hierarchies, distributions of labor, and systems of knowledge in ways that reflect and reproduce colonial patterns of domination. For decolonial theory, the most fundamental form of colonial domination is not economic extraction (as in Marxist analysis) but epistemic domination: the imposition of specific European ways of knowing, categorizing, and valuing the world that systematically marginalize and devalue the knowledge traditions of colonized peoples.

The most recent scholarship on the relationship between postcolonial and decolonial theory, particularly the special issue of Postcolonial Studies journal published in 2022 and 2023 that staged critical dialogues between the two traditions, and the 2024 work of David Myer Temin questioning Mignolo's claims about the epistemological turn in decolonial theory, reveals a productive tension between these two traditions that is directly relevant for understanding Sikder's theoretical legacy.

From the decolonial perspective, Sikder's Maoist framework is itself partially shaped by a colonial episteme: Marxism, despite its anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist commitments, is a theoretical tradition produced within the European intellectual tradition and carrying within it certain European assumptions about historical progress, class analysis, and the universality of specific forms of social organization. The application of this European theoretical framework to East Bengali conditions, even in an adapted and creolized form, replicates to some degree the "derivative discourse" problem that Partha Chatterjee identified in South Asian nationalism: the

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use of conceptual frameworks borrowed from the metropolitan intellectual tradition that may not be adequate to the specific epistemic conditions of the colonized world.

The decolonial critique of Sikder's Maoist framework is theoretically interesting but needs to be engaged critically rather than accepted wholesale. The problem with the most radical versions of the decolonial critique is that they tend to treat all European-derived theoretical frameworks as equally suspect and equally inadequate for understanding conditions of domination and exploitation in the global South. This is an overreach. Marxist political economy, despite its European origins, provides analytical tools for understanding the structures of capitalist exploitation, colonial resource transfer, and class domination that have demonstrated genuine explanatory power across many different social contexts, including the South Asian context. The validity of these analytical tools does not depend on the European origin of the theoretical tradition that produced them.

What the decolonial critique does validly point to is the need for intellectual humility in the application of any theoretical framework that was developed in one context to another context with different historical, cultural, and epistemic conditions, and the need to remain open to the possibility that aspects of the experience of colonized peoples may require theoretical innovations that go beyond the resources of any existing framework, including Marxism. Sikder's theoretical project was, in some respects, an early example of this kind of creative theoretical synthesis: an attempt to adapt a European theoretical framework to the specific conditions of a particular colonial situation in ways that produced genuinely new insights. The question is how adequate that adaptation was, and what further adaptations might be required to produce a fully adequate theoretical framework for the conditions of contemporary Bangladesh.

24.5 The Postcolonial State and the Problem of Nationalist Ideology

One of the most important theoretical dimensions of Sikder's colonial thesis, and one that connects directly to contemporary debates about the Bangladeshi political situation in 2025 and 2026, is his analysis of the relationship between Bengali nationalism and class power. Sikder's insistence that Bengali nationalism was primarily an expression of the class interests of the Bengali bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, rather than a genuinely emancipatory force for the working class and peasantry, was a theoretical position that cut against the dominant political current of his time.

The post-uprising debates in Bangladesh about national identity, as documented in the 2025 scholarship on postcolonial nationhood and the politics of belonging in Bangladesh, reveal the continuing salience of the questions that Sikder was raising. The Constitutional Reform Commission's proposal to remove secularism, socialism, and nationalism from the constitution, the symbolic violence directed against Mujibur Rahman's statues and iconography during and after the July 2024 uprising, and the emergence of competing visions of Bangladeshi national identity (Bengali secular nationalism versus Islamic Bangladeshi nationalism versus more plural and inclusive conceptions of political community) all reflect the continuing instability of the national ideology that Sikder's class analysis predicted.

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The theoretical framework of political theorist Benedict Anderson, developed in "Imagined Communities" (1983), provides one dimension of the analytical framework for understanding this situation: nationalism as the construction of a specific kind of imagined community through specific cultural, linguistic, and institutional practices, which serves the interests of specific classes and groups in particular historical contexts while claiming to represent the interests of all. But Anderson's framework, like most liberal political theory, does not adequately address the class dimensions of nationalist ideology that Sikder's analysis emphasized.

A more adequate theoretical framework for the specific situation of Bangladesh in 2025 combines Anderson's analysis of nationalism as constructed imagined community with Gramsci's analysis of hegemony as the mechanism through which particular class interests are presented as universal, with Sikder's own class analysis of the specific class fractions that have dominated Bangladeshi nationalism, and with the postcolonial theorists' analysis of the specific ways in which colonial history has shaped and constrained the possibilities of national imagination in formerly colonized societies.

The specific development in post-uprising Bangladesh that most directly vindicates aspects of Sikder's class analysis is the revealing behavior of the Awami League during and after the July 2024 uprising. The Awami League's willingness to use lethal violence against student protesters, its deployment of state resources including police, paramilitary forces, and affiliated political organizations against overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrators, and the scale of the state violence documented by the BBC, UN, and multiple human rights organizations, demonstrated the authoritarian character of its rule in ways that confirmed Sikder's class analysis of the Awami League as a party that would use state violence to defend its political position whenever democratic channels threatened it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: CLASS ANALYSIS AND POLITICAL ECONOMY: SIKDER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF BENGALI SOCIAL FORMATION

25.1 The Mode of Production Debate and Bengali Feudalism

Sikder's class analysis of the East Bengali social formation was anchored in the Maoist category of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial social formation, which Mao had originally developed to characterize China's situation in the 1920s and 1930s. The application of this analytical category to East Bengal required a specific analysis of whether, and in what sense, Bengali agrarian society could be characterized as feudal.

The question of feudalism in South Asian social history has been one of the most contested in the field. The "mode of production debate" that occupied South Asian historians and social scientists in the 1970s and 1980s, and that was associated with scholars including Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra, Jairus Banaji, and others, debated whether the characterization of South Asian agrarian

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relations as feudal was analytically appropriate or whether it misread Asian historical forms through a European conceptual lens.

The specifically Bangladeshi dimension of this debate is relevant for assessing Sikder's theoretical framework. The agrarian relations of the Bengal delta in the post-Partition period were, as we have analyzed in Parts One and Two, characterized by significant landlord power, extensive sharecropping and tenancy arrangements that extracted surplus from the peasantry, and usurious credit relations that trapped poor peasants in debt. Whether these relations constituted "feudalism" in a strict historical sense, whether they implied the same kind of extraeconomic coercion and personal dependence that characterized European feudalism, was theoretically contested.

The most recent scholarship in the history and political economy of South Asian agrarian relations, including the work published in the Journal of Agrarian Change and the Journal of Peasant Studies in 2024 and 2025, has moved toward a more nuanced analytical framework that distinguishes between formal feudalism (characterized by legal personal dependence and extraeconomic coercion) and semi-feudal or neo-feudal relations (characterized by economic forms of dependence that operate through the labor market and credit market rather than through explicit coercion but that produce similar levels of surplus extraction). This nuanced framework better accommodates the specific character of Bengal delta agrarian relations than either the strict feudalism characterization or the liberal "free labor market" characterization.

Sikder's use of the term "feudal" in his theoretical writings was less concerned with the strict historical-materialist definition of feudalism than with the practical reality that specific forms of landlord power and debt bondage were exploiting the Bengali peasantry in ways that required specific forms of political and organizational response. The land question, which he consistently identified as central to the new democratic revolution, was not primarily a question about the mode of production in the abstract sense but about who had access to land, on what terms, and through what mechanisms of power and coercion. These practical questions could be analytically addressed through the broadly feudal framework, even if the strict historical-materialist definition of feudalism was not fully applicable to the Bengal delta case.

25.2 The Working Class Question: Industrial Capital and Labor in Bangladesh

One of the most significant features of Sikder's class analysis that is worth examining in the light of subsequent historical developments is his treatment of the urban industrial working class. In the EBWM thesis and subsequent writings, the working class appears primarily as a supporting class in the new democratic revolution, alongside the poor peasantry (who are the primary revolutionary class in terms of numbers), the petty bourgeoisie (a potentially wavering ally), and a fraction of the national bourgeoisie (a temporary ally against imperialism and feudalism).

This treatment of the working class as relatively secondary, compared to the centrality of the peasantry in the revolutionary programme, reflected the actual social conditions of East Bengal in the late 1960s, where the industrial working class was small relative to the total population.

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The jute mills of Narayanganj, the port facilities of Chittagong, and the limited textile and food processing industries constituted the primary concentrations of industrial workers, and these groups, while politically significant given their organizational capacity and their concentration in specific locations, were numerically small relative to the tens of millions of peasants in the delta.

The subsequent development of Bangladesh's economy, particularly the explosive growth of the ready-made garment (RMG) industry from the 1980s onwards, has transformed this picture dramatically. Bangladesh today has one of the largest concentrations of garment workers in the world, with approximately four million workers (the vast majority of them women) employed in the garment sector. This massive industrial workforce, concentrated in the export processing zones and factory districts around Dhaka and Chittagong, represents exactly the kind of politically significant urban working class that classical Marxism identified as the primary revolutionary subject.

The political implications of this social transformation for Sikder's theoretical framework are significant. If Sikder was correct that the principal revolutionary force in East Bengali conditions was the peasantry, and if the subsequent development of capitalist production has produced a massive urban industrial working class, does this mean that the theoretical framework needs to be fundamentally revised, with the working class displacing the peasantry as the primary revolutionary subject? Or does the continued importance of rural poverty, with millions of Bangladesh's rural poor still dependent on agriculture and subject to the forms of exploitation that Sikder analyzed, mean that the peasant-centered analysis retains its validity alongside a new analysis of the urban working class?

The most interesting recent left political analyses in Bangladesh, including work circulated in connection with the post-uprising debates of 2024 and 2025, have grappled seriously with this question. The garment workers' labor movement, which has been one of the most significant sites of political struggle in Bangladesh over the past two decades, combining demands for wage increases, safety improvements, and trade union rights with broader challenges to the political economy of garment capitalism, represents a political practice that is neither easily assimilated into the Maoist peasant-centered framework nor fully explained by classical Marxist working-class analysis.

The garment workers' movement raises specific theoretical questions that go beyond the framework that Sikder developed. The specifically gendered character of the garment workforce (predominantly female in a predominantly patriarchal society) introduces gender as a dimension of political economy analysis that Sikder's framework did not adequately address. The specific international political economy of garment capitalism, in which Bangladeshi workers are embedded in global value chains controlled by international retail corporations operating in wealthy consumer markets, introduces dimensions of global economic structure that the semi-colonial/semi-feudal analytical framework captures only partially.

25.3 The Agrarian Question in Contemporary Bangladesh

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The agrarian question that Sikder placed at the center of his political programme, the question of land distribution, sharecropping relations, and rural indebtedness, remains incompletely resolved in contemporary Bangladesh, despite the dramatic economic changes of the past fifty years.

Bangladesh has experienced significant economic growth since independence, with GDP growth rates averaging over six percent annually for much of the past two decades. This growth has been accompanied by significant reductions in extreme poverty, measured by the international poverty line. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank have documented a substantial decline in the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty, from over forty percent in 2000 to under twenty percent by the early 2020s. Life expectancy has increased significantly, child mortality has fallen dramatically, and female education and workforce participation have expanded substantially.

However, the economic growth and poverty reduction of the past decades have been accompanied by dramatic increases in inequality. The distribution of the gains from economic growth has been highly skewed, with the wealthiest decile of the population capturing a disproportionate share of the growth while the rural poor and informal urban workers have seen much smaller improvements in their material conditions. Land concentration remains extremely high: the 2019 Bangladesh Agriculture Census documented that the top twenty percent of landowners own approximately eighty percent of agricultural land, while the bottom fifty percent of rural households are effectively landless or near-landless.

These distributional patterns are precisely what Sikder's class analysis predicted would result from bourgeois governance of the Bangladeshi economy. The combination of nominal capitalist development with extreme inequality in the distribution of its gains, the persistence of landlord power and rural indebtedness despite formal legal changes in land tenure, and the continuing political marginalization of the rural poor in a democracy formally committed to universal suffrage: these structural features of contemporary Bangladesh are consistent with the essential analytical insight of Sikder's comprador thesis, even if the specific mechanisms and political forms have changed substantially from the 1972 to 1975 period.

25.4 The Subaltern Speaks: Agency, Resistance, and Class in Contemporary Bangladesh

The Subaltern Studies collective, whose theoretical project emerged in the early 1980s under the editorial leadership of Ranajit Guha, represented one of the most important intellectual interventions in South Asian historical scholarship of the late twentieth century. Its central problematic, the recovery of the subaltern classes' own political agency and historical consciousness from the dominant historiographical frameworks that had rendered them voiceless, has deep connections to the questions that Sikder's revolutionary project raised.

Sikder's project was, among other things, an attempt to make the sarbahara, those who have nothing, the subjects rather than the objects of history. His insistence that the working class and peasantry were not merely victims of exploitation but potential historical agents capable of transforming their own conditions through organized political action reflected a fundamental

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commitment to subaltern agency that the Subaltern Studies project would subsequently explore through very different theoretical and methodological means.

The productive tension between Sikder's Maoist framework and the Subaltern Studies framework lies precisely in their different understandings of the relationship between organized revolutionary agency and the autonomous political consciousness of the subaltern classes. For Sikder, the subaltern classes' political consciousness needed to be organized and led by the vanguard party in order to be transformed from spontaneous resistance into revolutionary political action. For the Subaltern Studies scholars, the subaltern's own political consciousness and forms of resistance had their own integrity and validity that were not adequately captured by Marxist class analysis or vanguard party theory.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" raised this tension in its sharpest form. Spivak argued that the subaltern, particularly the female subaltern, cannot genuinely speak within the existing frameworks of political representation and theoretical analysis, because those frameworks are themselves shaped by the dominant power structures that produce and maintain subalternity. This radical argument, which has been extensively debated and both criticized and extended in subsequent scholarship, challenges the foundational assumption of both Marxist vanguardism and liberal democracy that there is a clear and accessible path from the subaltern's experience to her political representation.

Applied to the Bangladesh case in 2025, the question of subaltern agency and political voice is posed with particular acuity by the July 2024 uprising. The uprising was, in significant ways, a subaltern uprising: a mass movement of students, workers, and ordinary citizens who were excluded from the formal political structures that the Awami League had captured, who mobilized independently of established political parties and organizations, and who succeeded in overthrowing an entrenched authoritarian government through collective action that took established political actors by surprise. The uprising represents, in this sense, precisely the kind of subaltern political agency that the Subaltern Studies scholars sought to recover from historical obscurity, but now as a live political event rather than a historical reconstruction.

The question of what comes next, of how the political energies released by the July 2024 uprising can be sustained and organized in ways that genuinely serve the interests of the most marginalized, is exactly the question that Sikder spent his entire adult life trying to answer. The post-uprising debates in Bangladesh, including the emergence of new student-led political formations like the National Citizen Party (Jatiya Nagarik Party), the contested discussions about constitutional reform, and the ongoing struggles of garment workers and rural poor for economic rights, are all dimensions of the continuing unresolved struggle that Sikder's life pointed toward.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY AND VANGUARD POLITICS: THE LENINISM OF SIKDER'S PARTY

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26.1 Lenin's Organizational Legacy and Its Contemporary Critics

The organizational model that Sikder adopted for the EBWM and subsequently the PBSP was the Leninist vanguard party model, as interpreted through the lens of Mao Zedong's organizational theory and enriched by the specific innovations of the mass line concept. We have analyzed this organizational model in Parts Two and Three in its historical and jurisprudential dimensions. Here we examine it from the perspective of contemporary political theory and organizational studies, engaging with the most recent theoretical discussions about the possibilities and limitations of this organizational form.

The Leninist vanguard party model has been the subject of sustained and sophisticated criticism from multiple directions in the political theory literature of the past several decades. The criticisms come from liberal democratic theory (which objects to the paternalism inherent in the claim to lead on behalf of a class that has not consented to that leadership), from anarchist and council communist traditions (which object to the hierarchical and centralized character of the Leninist model and its tendency to reproduce rather than challenge relations of authority), from feminist political theory (which objects to the gendered dimensions of vanguard leadership and the ways in which the Leninist party model replicates patriarchal organizational forms), and from the post-operaist or autonomist Marxist tradition (which develops the alternative of horizontal, networked forms of political organization against the Leninist vertical hierarchy).

The most theoretically sophisticated recent engagement with this question is found in the work of political theorist Jodi Dean, whose "Crowds and Party" (2016) represents perhaps the most serious contemporary attempt to rehabilitate the Leninist party form against its critics. Dean argues that the criticisms of the vanguard party model, while valid against specific historical instances of its pathological degeneration, do not establish that the organizational form itself is inherently authoritarian or inherently incapable of democratic practice. Her argument is that the party form, understood as a site of collective political identification and shared commitment rather than as a bureaucratic hierarchy, provides essential organizational resources for sustained political struggle that horizontal networked forms of organization cannot provide.

Dean's argument has direct relevance for assessing Sikder's organizational project. The PBSP was, at its best, an attempt to create exactly the kind of collective political identification and shared commitment that Dean identifies as the positive potential of the party form: a community of comrades united by a shared analysis of social reality, a shared commitment to the cause of the oppressed, and a shared set of organizational practices that sustained that commitment over time and under conditions of severe external pressure. The failures of the PBSP's organizational practice, including the internal authoritarianism and the inadequate due process in handling accusations of betrayal, were failures not of the party form as such but of specific applications of that form under specific conditions.

The alternative organizational models that have been proposed by the critics of the Leninist form, including horizontal networked organizations, prefigurative politics, and various forms of decentralized grassroots organizing, face their own specific difficulties in the context of

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sustained struggle against powerful state and class interests. The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, which was notably leaderless and party-independent in its initial phase, demonstrated both the extraordinary mobilizing power of networked, decentralized political action and the difficulty of sustaining that mobilization and translating it into durable political transformation without some form of organized political leadership.

26.2 Democratic Centralism: Structure, Practice, and the Accountability Problem

Democratic centralism, the organizational principle that governed the internal life of the PBSP, has been analyzed in its historical dimensions in Parts Two and Three. Here we examine it from the perspective of organizational theory and political philosophy, asking what the principle requires in theory and what its implementation tends to produce in practice.

The formal definition of democratic centralism, as developed in the Leninist tradition, specifies two complementary requirements: that decisions are made through democratic discussion within the party at all levels (the democratic dimension), and that once decisions are made they are binding on all members and implemented as directed by the appropriate level of the party hierarchy (the centralist dimension). The intended relationship between these two dimensions is one of complementarity and mutual reinforcement: the centralist dimension provides the organizational discipline necessary for effective political action, while the democratic dimension prevents the degeneration of centralism into bureaucratic dictatorship.

The practical difficulty, as the historical experience of every Leninist organization has demonstrated with remarkable consistency across many different contexts, is that the democratic and centralist dimensions tend to be in tension rather than complementarity. Under conditions of external threat, security imperatives consistently favor the centralist dimension (where internal debate can be portrayed as a security risk) over the democratic dimension (where openness to criticism and dissent is difficult to maintain under clandestine conditions). Over time, this structural bias toward centralism tends to produce the concentration of effective authority in the hands of the party's top leadership and the progressive attenuation of genuinely democratic internal practice.

The organizational theorist Roberto Michels, writing in 1911 in "Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy," identified what he called the "iron law of oligarchy": the tendency of all large organizations, regardless of their stated democratic commitments, to develop concentrated leadership structures whose primary interest becomes the maintenance of their own power. Michels's analysis was specifically directed at socialist parties, and it has been applied extensively to Leninist organizations. The experience of the PBSP, where Sikder's personal authority became increasingly central to the party's organizational coherence and where internal mechanisms for challenging that authority were progressively weakened, illustrates the iron law in operation.

The contemporary organizational theory literature has developed more nuanced frameworks for understanding organizational dynamics in revolutionary movements. The work of scholars like

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Sidney Tarrow, in "Power in Movement" (1994 and subsequent editions), and Charles Tilly, in "Contentious Performances" (2008), provides tools for analyzing the organizational dynamics of social movements without either idealizing horizontal self-organization or accepting the inevitability of oligarchic degeneration. Their analyses suggest that the key variable is not the formal organizational model (hierarchical versus horizontal) but the specific mechanisms of accountability, information flow, and leadership selection that the organization develops and maintains over time.

For the PBSP, the critical organizational failure was not the adoption of democratic centralism as a formal principle but the inadequacy of the specific accountability mechanisms that would have been necessary to prevent democratic centralism from degenerating into de facto oligarchy. An organization conducting regular party congresses with genuine deliberation, multiple mechanisms for challenging leadership decisions, transparent procedures for handling internal disputes, and regular rotation of leadership positions would have been much better positioned to maintain genuine democratic internal life than one that relied primarily on the personal authority of a charismatic leader whose decisions were difficult to challenge within the party's internal culture.

26.3 The Mass Line in Practice: Limits of the Concept Under Conditions of Clandestinity

The concept of the mass line, which we have analyzed in earlier chapters as Mao's organizational principle for preventing both commandism and tailism, deserves extended examination in this theoretical chapter from the perspective of what organizational practice the concept actually requires and whether those requirements are compatible with the conditions under which the PBSP was operating.

The mass line, as we have analyzed, requires a constant dialectical relationship between the party's theoretical knowledge and the lived experience and consciousness of the masses the party seeks to lead. This requirement implies a specific set of organizational practices: regular, systematic contact between party cadres and the mass communities they serve; mechanisms for collecting and systematically processing the ideas, grievances, and aspirations of those communities; a culture within the party that values and rewards cadres who bring accurate and unflattering information about mass conditions back to the leadership rather than telling the leadership what it wants to hear; and a willingness at the leadership level to revise theoretical positions and tactical orientations in response to the lessons of actual mass work.

The PBSP's organizational conditions made the genuine implementation of all of these requirements extremely difficult. The party's cadres were concentrated in relatively small numbers in specific areas, primarily the southern delta and the major cities, and their ability to maintain regular, systematic contact with mass communities was constrained by security considerations. The clandestine character of the party's operations meant that the systematic collection and processing of information about mass conditions could not be done openly; it had to rely on the reports of individual cadres, who were themselves under intense external pressure and who had organizational incentives to report success rather than difficulty.

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The most significant practical limitation on the mass line, however, was the party's inability to genuinely understand and respond to the specific consciousness and aspirations of the rural poor in the areas where it was working. The PBSP's cadres, predominantly educated urban young people from petty bourgeois backgrounds, were working among rural agricultural laborers and poor peasants whose material conditions, cultural frameworks, and political consciousness were shaped by experiences very different from those of the cadres themselves. The cultural distance between the educated urban cadre and the illiterate rural poor was significant, and bridging it required time, patience, and genuine humility that the pressures of organizational work and external threat made very difficult to maintain.

This analysis does not mean that the mass line concept itself is invalid. It means that the mass line is an organizational ideal that requires specific organizational conditions to be genuinely implemented, and that those conditions were not fully present in the PBSP's situation. The most productive theoretical question is not whether Sikder should have adopted the mass line concept (which remains a genuinely valuable organizational principle) but what specific organizational innovations would have been required to make the mass line more genuinely operative in the specific conditions of the Bangladesh delta in the 1970s.

26.4 The Vanguard Party and the Internet Age: Contemporary Relevance

The most provocative question in contemporary discussions of the vanguard party form, and one that has direct relevance for assessing Sikder's organizational legacy in the context of the post-uprising Bangladesh of 2025 and 2026, is whether the Leninist vanguard party model is at all relevant to contemporary conditions, where social media platforms, networked communication, and leaderless horizontal organizing have demonstrated their capacity to mobilize millions of people for political action.

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh was organized primarily through social media platforms, particularly TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp, without any central party organization providing strategic direction. The students who initiated the quota reform protests and subsequently escalated into demands for regime change were connected horizontally through digital networks rather than vertically through party structures. This mode of organization produced an extraordinary political result: the overthrow of a government that had seemed untouchable through fifteen years of increasingly entrenched authoritarian rule.

But the aftermath of the uprising has also illustrated the limitations of leaderless networked organizing. The political transition after the uprising has been fragmented and uncertain, with multiple competing forces and visions for Bangladesh's future, without any organized political force capable of translating the uprising's democratic energy into a coherent institutional programme. The interim government of Muhammad Yunus, which came to power on the wave of the uprising, is not a revolutionary government but a technocratic caretaker administration; the Constitutional Reform Commission's proposals are contested; elections have been repeatedly delayed; and the question of what Bangladesh will look like after the transition remains genuinely open.

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This post-uprising situation illustrates precisely the organizational problem that Lenin analyzed in his theory of the vanguard party: the gap between the spontaneous political energy of a mass movement and the organized political capacity necessary to translate that energy into lasting institutional change. The uprising demonstrated that networked horizontal organizing can achieve extraordinary results in the negative task of regime change: bringing down an entrenched government. What the post-uprising experience is demonstrating is the difficulty of networked horizontal organizing in the positive task of institutional transformation: building new democratic institutions, implementing structural reforms, and organizing the sustained political pressure that fundamental change requires.

This is not an argument that the Leninist vanguard party model is the answer to the organizational problem that the post-uprising Bangladesh faces. The specific historical experience of Leninist parties, including the PBSP, gives serious reasons for caution about the adoption of that organizational model. But it is an argument that the organizational questions that Lenin and Mao were addressing, the questions of how to sustain political commitment over time, how to translate mass political energy into durable institutional change, and how to organize the relationship between intellectual and strategic leadership and mass democratic participation, remain genuinely urgent even in the age of social media and networked organizing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: STRATEGIC THEORY AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF REVOLUTION: REVISITING PROTRACTED PEOPLE'S WAR

27.1 Mao's Strategy of Protracted People's War: A Critical Reassessment

The strategy of protracted people's war that Sikder adopted from the Maoist tradition has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis, both in its original Chinese context and in its various global applications. A comprehensive critical reassessment of this strategy, in the light of both the historical experience of Maoist revolutionary movements and the contemporary theoretical literature on political violence, strategy, and revolutionary mobilization, is necessary for evaluating Sikder's strategic legacy.

Mao Zedong developed his theory of protracted people's war in a series of military and political writings produced during the period of the Chinese Communist Party's resistance to both the Nationalist government and the Japanese invasion, particularly in essays such as "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War" (1936), "On Protracted War" (1938), and "On the Question of Political Power in the Anti-Japanese War" (1940). The central strategic insight of these works was that a revolutionary movement facing a militarily superior enemy must not seek decisive military confrontation early in the conflict, when the enemy's superiority is greatest, but must instead pursue a long-term strategy of building strength gradually through guerrilla warfare, political mobilization, and the establishment of rural base areas, wearing down the enemy's will and capacity while building the revolutionary forces' own military and political strength.

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This strategy had three distinct but related dimensions. The military dimension involved guerrilla tactics: the use of small mobile units, surprise attacks, and the exploitation of local knowledge and popular support to impose costs on the enemy without accepting battle on terms unfavorable to the revolutionary forces. The political dimension involved mass mobilization: the systematic political work among the peasant population in the base areas, building political consciousness, organizing the peasantry into revolutionary institutions, and creating the political infrastructure of the future revolutionary state. The territorial dimension involved base area construction: the establishment of specific geographic areas under the effective military and political control of the revolutionary party, from which guerrilla operations could be launched and to which revolutionary forces could withdraw for rest and reorganization.

The critical question for the application of this strategy to any specific context is whether the political, social, and geographic conditions exist that make all three dimensions of the strategy simultaneously operational. The Chinese case provided the conditions: vast territory with geographically isolated rural areas that could serve as base areas, a peasantry with strong grievances against both the landlord class and the Japanese occupiers, and a period of twenty-two years (1927 to 1949) during which the revolutionary movement could develop its strength without being required to seek decisive confrontation before it was ready.

The global experience of Maoist movements that adopted this strategy after the Chinese revolution provides a rich comparative database for assessing the conditions under which the strategy works and the conditions under which it fails. The most instructive recent cases, given their proximity to Sikder's period and their South Asian context, are the Nepal and India cases.

The Nepalese Maoist movement, which launched its people's war in 1996 and concluded it through a negotiated settlement in 2006, provides the closest successful (or semi-successful) application of protracted people's war in South Asia. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) achieved significant territorial control in the rural hill districts of Nepal, built effective mass organizations among the peasantry and indigenous communities, and developed a military capacity that the Nepalese state's security forces were unable to decisively defeat. The settlement that ended the conflict and brought the Maoists into the political process involved genuine power-sharing and the restructuring of Nepal's political system, including the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal democratic republic. From the perspective of the Nepalese Maoists' own strategic framework, the outcome was a partial victory that achieved some of their objectives while leaving others unresolved.

The Indian Naxalite movement, which has maintained continuous armed struggle since the 1960s under successive organizational forms, provides a contrasting case. As of 2024, the Naxal influence zone had shrunk from a peak of nearly 180 districts in the late 2000s to 38 districts, with the Indian government claiming near-complete victory over the insurgency by early 2026. Wikipedia The Indian case illustrates the limits of protracted people's war against a large, economically growing democratic state with the organizational and financial capacity to simultaneously pursue counterinsurgency operations and developmental programs in affected areas.

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The Nepal-India comparison, when applied to the Bangladesh case, suggests that geographic and political conditions are the primary determinants of whether protracted people's war can be successfully implemented. Nepal's terrain, with its mountain ranges and isolated valleys, provided the geographic conditions for base area construction that the Indian plains and the Bengal delta do not. And Nepal's political conditions, with a monarchy widely perceived as illegitimate and a political class that could eventually be brought to negotiate rather than simply defeat the Maoists, were more favorable than the conditions faced by either the Indian Naxalites or the PBSP.

27.2 The Geographical Imagination of Revolution: Space, Territory, and Strategy

The relationship between geographical conditions and revolutionary strategy is one of the most underanalyzed dimensions of comparative revolutionary studies, and it is one that is directly relevant for understanding both the specific failures of the PBSP's strategic project and the broader question of what strategic forms are appropriate for different geographical contexts.

Political geographers and human geographers have developed sophisticated frameworks for analyzing the relationship between space, territory, and political power that are directly relevant here. The work of Doreen Massey, particularly in "For Space" (2005), argues against the tendency to think of space as static container for political events and instead emphasizes the dynamic, relational, and contested character of spatial formations. Applied to revolutionary strategy, Massey's framework suggests that the "space" of revolution is not simply the terrain of a country but the specific configuration of social relations, power relations, and mobility patterns that make specific territories available for specific kinds of political practice.

From this geographical perspective, the PBSP's problem in applying protracted people's war to the Bengal delta was not simply that the terrain was flat and difficult to defend. It was that the specific spatial configuration of social relations in the delta, including the dense integration of rural communities into river-based trading networks, the high population density that made it impossible for any armed group to avoid civilian entanglement, and the permeability of the delta landscape to both movement and surveillance, created a spatial environment fundamentally inhospitable to the kind of "liberated zone" construction that Mao's strategy required.

The concept of the "liberated zone" or "base area" is centrally spatial in the Maoist strategic framework: it is a specific territory that is under the effective military and political control of the revolutionary movement, from which the movement can operate without the constant threat of enemy attack and in which it can build the institutions of the future revolutionary state. The Bengal delta's spatial configuration made genuine liberated zone construction essentially impossible: the government's security forces could reach any location in the delta by river within hours, and the absence of natural defensive terrain meant that any attempt to establish a fixed base area was extremely vulnerable to government attack.

The most creative dimension of Sikder's geographical imagination of revolution was his attempt to turn this spatial limitation into a strategic resource by using the river network itself as a zone

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of operations: moving quickly and lightly through the waterways, avoiding fixed positions, and using the mobility of small watercraft to conduct operations over a wide area. This guerrilla geography of the rivers was a genuine adaptation of Maoist strategy to local conditions. Its limitation was that this mobile guerrilla approach could harass and impose costs on the government's forces but could not establish the stable territorial presence that genuine base area construction required.

27.3 The Lesson of Nepal: Protracted People's War and the Question of Political Settlement

The Nepalese Maoist movement's trajectory from armed struggle to political settlement and its subsequent struggles within the political system provides important lessons for assessing the strategic possibilities of protracted people's war as a revolutionary strategy in South Asia.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which had conducted a decade-long people's war that achieved genuine military stalemate with the Nepalese state's security forces and had built significant political organizations in the rural hill districts, entered into a peace process in 2006 that led to a comprehensive peace agreement, the integration of the Maoist combatants into the national army, and the Maoists' participation in constituent assembly elections in which they won the largest share of seats. The subsequent political history of the Nepalese Maoists, including multiple splits, the formation of competing successor parties, and the ultimate marginalization of the movement from the central political positions it had seemed to be on the verge of achieving in 2008, illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of revolutionary movements' transitions from armed struggle to parliamentary politics.

For Sikder's theoretical legacy, the Nepalese case raises a specific question: would the PBSP's revolutionary project have been better served by a strategic orientation toward political settlement rather than indefinite armed struggle? Given the geographical and organizational conditions analyzed above, the PBSP's armed campaign was unlikely to achieve the military success necessary for a revolutionary seizure of power. A strategic shift toward building mass political organizations, pursuing legal political activity, and seeking to build a political coalition capable of challenging the Awami League through the political system might have been a more viable path to advancing the interests of the working class and peasantry.

Sikder's own theoretical framework, which categorically ruled out participation in the political system of a "comprador bourgeois" state, did not allow for this strategic flexibility. The question of whether this theoretical rigidity was a principled commitment or a strategic error is one that cannot be definitively resolved, but the weight of the evidence suggests that it was a significant strategic limitation. The experience of Communist parties that have successfully combined legal political activity with mass mobilization, including the Indian Communist Party (Marxist) in Kerala and West Bengal and various left parties in Latin America, suggests that the rigid exclusion of parliamentary engagement is not a necessary implication of a commitment to fundamental social transformation.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: SIKDER AND THE GLOBAL MAOIST MOMENT: COMPARATIVE THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

28.1 The Global Maoist Movement: Theoretical Unity and Organizational Fragmentation

The global Maoist movement of the 1960s and 1970s represented one of the most significant attempts in the history of international communism to develop a unified theoretical framework and organizational practice applicable across diverse national and social contexts. Understanding the PBSP's place within this global movement is important for assessing both what was specific to Sikder's theoretical project and what was shared with the broader Maoist theoretical tradition.

The global Maoist movement emerged from the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s as a distinct political current claiming to represent the authentic revolutionary Marxist tradition against what it characterized as the revisionism of the Soviet-aligned communist parties. At its peak in the early 1970s, the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), the principal organizational expression of global Maoism, brought together Maoist parties and organizations from dozens of countries on every inhabited continent. The PBSP was among the Asian parties associated with this broader movement.

The theoretical unity claimed by the global Maoist movement was real in terms of shared texts and shared vocabulary: all Maoist organizations drew on Mao's theoretical writings, shared the critique of Soviet revisionism, adopted the strategic framework of protracted people's war, and used the analytical categories of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal social formation, the new democratic revolution, and the mass line. But beneath this theoretical unity, there was enormous variation in the specific ways in which different national movements applied the Maoist framework to their specific conditions, and there were genuine theoretical disagreements about important questions of strategy, organizational form, and the nature of the revolutionary process.

The Cold War from the Global South article published in Social Science History in 2024 notes that Maoists in Bangladesh were "relatively isolated from Global Maoism" given China's support for Pakistan during the 1971 liberation war, which put Bangladeshi Maoists in a uniquely difficult ideological position. Cambridge Core This isolation, which we have analyzed in its historical dimensions in Part Two, had significant theoretical consequences: it forced Sikder to develop positions that were independent of the Chinese center of the global Maoist movement in ways that other national Maoist movements did not face.

The most interesting dimension of this enforced theoretical independence is Sikder's position on the liberation war itself. His insistence on participating in the liberation war against Pakistan while rejecting the Chinese position (which supported Pakistan for geopolitical reasons) required him to develop a theoretical argument for why the liberation of East Bengal from Pakistani rule was a genuinely anti-imperialist struggle even though China, the primary anti-imperialist power in the Maoist framework, was supporting Pakistan. This theoretical maneuver, while intellectually awkward, was forced by the specific conditions of the Bengali situation and

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produced a more sophisticated analysis of the relationship between national liberation and class struggle than many other Maoist movements achieved.

28.2 Comparing Three Asian Maoist Movements: Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines

A systematic comparative analysis of the three major Asian Maoist movements, the PBSP in Bangladesh, the CPN(M) in Nepal, and the CPP in the Philippines, reveals important patterns of similarity and difference that illuminate both what was distinctive about Sikder's theoretical project and what were the structural conditions that shaped the outcomes of all three movements.

All three movements adopted the Maoist theoretical framework of the semi-colonial, semi-feudal social formation and the new democratic revolution through protracted people's war. All three were founded by educated urban intellectuals who sought to organize a revolutionary movement primarily among the rural peasantry. All three faced intense state counterinsurgency operations that severely constrained their organizational capacity. And all three have produced extensive theoretical and political literatures that continue to influence left politics in their respective countries.

The most important difference between the PBSP and the other two movements is the specifically national-liberation dimension of the PBSP's project, which distinguished it from both the Nepalese and Philippine cases. Sikder's colonial thesis, which identified Pakistani rule as a form of colonial domination analogous to British colonial rule, meant that the PBSP's revolutionary project had an anti-colonial dimension that the Nepalese and Philippine movements did not have in the same form. The liberation war of 1971 gave the PBSP an organizational opportunity, the establishment of base areas in the southern delta during the war, that the other movements did not have. But it also created the specific organizational and political challenges of the post-independence period, when the PBSP had to make the extremely difficult transition from fighting a colonial occupier to fighting a popular national government.

The Nepalese movement's relative success in achieving a political settlement and some degree of institutional recognition, compared to the PBSP's organizational destruction, reflects several important differences. Nepal's geographic conditions, with mountainous terrain providing defensible base areas, were far more favorable to protracted people's war than the Bengal delta. The Nepalese state's capacity and willingness for sustained counterinsurgency was more limited than the Bangladeshi state's, partly because of the Nepalese army's smaller size and weaker organizational capacity and partly because of the international diplomatic pressures that constrained the scale of state violence. And the Nepalese Maoists' strategic flexibility, their willingness to enter into a political settlement when military stalemate had been achieved, was greater than the PBSP's rigid commitment to armed struggle to the end.

The Philippine movement, which has maintained armed struggle continuously for over five decades without achieving decisive revolutionary breakthrough or strategic settlement, provides a cautionary parallel to the PBSP's trajectory. The CPP has been far more organizationally durable than the PBSP, surviving multiple internal crises and counterinsurgency operations to

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maintain a continuing presence in several regions of the Philippines. But its continuous armed struggle has also produced continuous human costs, including both the deaths of guerrillas and security forces and the suffering of civilian communities caught between the two sides, without a clear path to either revolutionary victory or political settlement. The Philippine case suggests that organizational durability, while necessary, is not sufficient for revolutionary success.

28.3 Maoism After Mao: The Collapse of the Chinese Revolutionary Model and Its Consequences

Mao Zedong died in September 1976, and the subsequent political changes in China under Deng Xiaoping represented, from the perspective of global Maoist movements, a fundamental betrayal of the revolutionary line. Deng's "socialist market economy," his embrace of foreign direct investment, his abandonment of Maoist political vocabulary, and his rejection of the Cultural Revolution as a political disaster all appeared to the international Maoist movement as a restoration of capitalism in China, a transformation analogous to what the Maoists had been criticizing the Soviet Union for since the 1960s.

The political consequences for global Maoism of Deng's reforms were severe. The Chinese government, which had provided some degree of political and material support to various Maoist movements around the world, withdrew this support as the new Chinese leadership normalized its relations with the governments those movements were fighting. More importantly, the theoretical model of the Chinese revolution as a successful example of Maoist strategy that could be replicated in other contexts was significantly complicated by the subsequent trajectory of the Chinese state: a country that had made the new democratic revolution and was supposedly in the process of socialist construction had, in the Maoist view, reverted to capitalism within a single generation of the revolution's success.

The PBSP, which was already in organizational crisis following Sikder's death in January 1975, faced the additional theoretical challenge of Deng's China in 1976 and 1978. The collapse of the Chinese model as a source of theoretical authority and organizational solidarity was a significant blow to all Maoist movements globally, and the PBSP was no exception.

The theoretical response of global Maoism to this crisis was the development of "Maoism" as a distinct theoretical synthesis, as opposed to "Mao Zedong Thought," which claimed that Mao's theoretical contributions represented a qualitative advance beyond Marxism-Leninism that retained its validity independently of the subsequent trajectory of the Chinese Communist Party. This theoretical move, which was associated particularly with the Peruvian Shining Path and the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement in the 1980s and 1990s, insisted that the principles of protracted people's war, the mass line, and continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat were universally valid contributions to revolutionary theory that did not depend for their validity on the specific Chinese experience or the continued revolutionary character of the Chinese state.

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The PBSP and its successor organizations participated in this broader global Maoist debate about the appropriate response to Deng's China, and the specific positions taken by different PBSP factions on the question of whether to characterize their ideology as "Mao Zedong Thought" or "Maoism" were markers of deeper theoretical divisions within the surviving Bangladeshi Maoist movement.

28.4 The 2025 and 2026 State of Maoist Movements: A Global Survey

The current state of Maoist movements globally in 2025 and 2026 provides important context for assessing the continuing relevance of the theoretical framework that Sikder developed and the organizational trajectory of the PBSP's successors.

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) faced major setbacks in 2024 and 2025 as the Indian government intensified counterinsurgency operations, with the group's general secretary Nambala Keshava Rao killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh in May 2025, and the subsequent general secretary Thippiri Tirupathi surrendering in February 2026. Wikipedia By 2026, the Indian government claimed victory over the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency, with Naxal influence contracting from 180 districts at its peak to only around 12 districts, marking the achievement of a "Naxal-free" India by March 2026. Wikipedia

This near-collapse of the Indian Naxalite movement, which was the largest and most militarily significant Maoist insurgency in the world, represents a significant historical development for the global Maoist movement. The specific reasons for the Indian Naxalites' decline include the Indian state's sustained counterinsurgency campaigns, the development programs targeting the tribal communities that formed the Naxalites' primary social base, the loss of experienced leadership through death and arrest, and the organizational fragmentation that resulted from multiple internal splits.

The Indian case provides a direct and sobering parallel for assessing the PBSP's trajectory. Both movements applied the Maoist strategy of protracted people's war in conditions that were ultimately unfavorable to that strategy: dense population, limited isolated terrain, and state security forces with the organizational capacity and political will for sustained counterinsurgency. Both movements suffered progressive organizational attrition from state repression. And both movements were unable to develop the mass political base that would have been necessary to sustain the guerrilla campaign over the long term without the organizational losses that state counterinsurgency imposed.

The contrast with the Nepalese case, where protracted people's war was applied in conditions of mountainous terrain and relatively limited state counterinsurgency capacity, and where the movement achieved a political settlement that brought it into the formal political process, suggests that the key variable determining outcomes across these cases is not the quality of the revolutionary leadership or the validity of the theoretical framework but the specific geographic and political conditions that determine whether the strategy of protracted people's war can be sustained long enough to achieve its objectives.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: POSTCOLONIAL AND DECOLONIAL READINGS OF SIKDER'S LEGACY

29.1 Said, Representation, and the Colonial Archive

Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1978) and "Culture and Imperialism" (1993) established the foundational framework for postcolonial analysis of the relationship between knowledge, power, and colonial domination. Said argued that the Western representation of the "Orient" (including South Asia) was not a neutral reflection of reality but a systematic set of representations that served specific political and ideological functions: constructing the colonized world as backward, irrational, and incapable of self-governance in ways that simultaneously justified colonial rule and shaped the actual conditions of colonial society.

The application of Said's framework to the Bangladesh case reveals the specific ways in which colonial representations of Bengali society, including the representation of Bengali Muslims as fanatical, of Bengali peasants as innately passive, and of Bengali political aspirations as derivative of Hindu or Indian influences, shaped both the actual conditions of colonial society and the self-understanding of the Bengali political movements that emerged from it. Sikder's theoretical project can be understood, in part, as an attempt to develop an alternative representation of Bengali society and Bengali political possibilities that escaped the frame of colonial knowledge: a representation that insisted on the Bengali people's capacity for radical political agency, on the material basis of their exploitation rather than its cultural rationalization, and on the universal validity of revolutionary principles rather than their limitation to the "advanced" societies of the European tradition.

The specifically Saidian question about Sikder's project is whether his Maoist theoretical framework, despite its revolutionary intentions, reproduced certain colonial epistemic assumptions in the process of challenging colonial power. The characterization of Bengali peasants as primarily defined by their class position (poor peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants) rather than by their specific cultural, religious, and community identities; the assumption that revolutionary political consciousness, once properly developed through the mass line, would take the same universally valid form regardless of cultural difference; and the tendency to evaluate political movements primarily in terms of their class position rather than their cultural and historical specificity: these tendencies in Sikder's framework could be criticized from a Saidian perspective as reflecting the colonial episteme's characteristic abstraction of colonized peoples from their specific cultural context.

This criticism is theoretically interesting but needs to be balanced against the recognition that Sikder's class analysis was itself a form of resistance to colonial representation: it insisted on the material specificity of Bengali exploitation against the colonial representation of poverty as natural or culturally determined, and it asserted the capacity of the Bengali poor for political agency against the colonial representation of peasant passivity.

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29.2 Spivak and the Problem of Representation: Who Speaks for the Sarbahara?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's deconstruction of the Subaltern Studies project, and her broader critique of the conditions under which the subaltern can speak within existing representational frameworks, raises the most challenging questions for any assessment of Sikder's revolutionary project.

Spivak's argument, in its most condensed form, is that the subaltern cannot speak because any act of speaking within existing political and representational frameworks requires the adoption of frameworks that are themselves products of the dominant power structure, and that this adoption necessarily distorts or erases what is most specifically subaltern about the subaltern's experience. The political representative who claims to speak on behalf of the subaltern, whether the Leninist vanguard party or the postcolonial intellectual, inevitably substitutes a translated, systematized, and politically legible version of the subaltern's experience for that experience itself.

This argument has direct force against Sikder's PBSP. The party claimed to speak on behalf of and to lead the sarbahara, those who had nothing. But the party was led by educated urban intellectuals whose relationship to the landless laborers and poor peasants they sought to represent was mediated by the conceptual frameworks of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, the organizational structures of democratic centralism, and the cultural distance between the petty bourgeois educated cadre and the illiterate rural poor. The specific ways in which the PBSP's theoretical framework translated the experience of the rural poor into the categories of Maoist political economy, the transformation of the peasant's experience of hunger and landlord exploitation into the abstract categories of semi-feudalism and class contradiction, inevitably involved a degree of representational substitution that Spivak's framework identifies as constitutive of the subaltern's inability to speak within organized political representation.

The practical implications of this critique for the assessment of Sikder's project are important but limited. Spivak's argument is a critique of the conditions of representation in general, not a claim that organized political representation is inherently impossible or that subaltern interests can never be advanced through political organizing. The critique points to the need for humility about the gap between the party's representation of subaltern interests and the subaltern's own experience, and to the importance of maintaining genuine accountability to the communities the party claims to represent rather than substituting the party's theoretical framework for those communities' own political judgment.

29.3 Chakrabarty and Provincializing Maoism

Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Provincializing Europe" (2000) argues that European historical frameworks, including Marxism, need to be "provincialized": recognized as specific products of a particular historical and geographical tradition rather than as universally valid frameworks applicable without qualification to all societies. This "provincialization" does not mean abandoning the analytical insights of European theory but requires a specific intellectual posture

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of recognizing the limits and situatedness of any theoretical framework while remaining open to the theoretical resources provided by other intellectual traditions.

Applied to Sikder's Maoist framework, Chakrabarty's "provincialization" approach would require acknowledging that Maoism is itself a product of specific historical conditions (Chinese revolutionary struggle in a large continental agrarian society under conditions of Japanese invasion and civil war) that are not simply transferable to the very different conditions of the Bengali delta in the 1960s and 1970s. The analytical insights of Maoism, including the emphasis on the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, the concept of the mass line, and the analysis of the new democratic revolution, retain their value as theoretical tools even when the specific strategic prescriptions derived from the Chinese case need to be substantially modified for different conditions.

What Chakrabarty's framework adds to this assessment is the suggestion that the inadequacy of the Maoist framework as a guide to revolutionary practice in East Bengal might be addressed not only by better adaptation of the Maoist framework itself but by drawing on the intellectual resources of Bengali cultural and political tradition that Sikder's Maoist framework tended to minimize. The rich tradition of Bengali political and philosophical thought, including the reformist and radical currents of nineteenth and twentieth century Bengali intellectual life, the specific forms of peasant resistance and community solidarity embedded in Bengali rural culture, and the intellectual resources of Islamic reform traditions that were central to the political culture of East Bengali Muslims, all represented theoretical and political resources that Sikder's rigidly Maoist framework did not adequately engage.

29.4 Decolonial Theory and the Question of Epistemic Liberation

The decolonial theorists, particularly Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano, have developed a framework for understanding colonial domination that extends beyond political economy to encompass what they call the "coloniality of knowledge": the way in which European epistemology, the specific framework of categories, methods, and criteria of validity established by the European Enlightenment and perpetuated through colonial educational systems, established itself as the universal standard of legitimate knowledge while marginalizing or delegitimizing non-European ways of knowing.

As Tanabe's 2025 article on anticolonialism, postcolonialism, and decoloniality argues, the decolonial option has tried to enlist anticolonial revolutionary thinkers like Fanon into its project, while also probing the paradox of current decolonial discourse that "undermined anticolonial radical praxes as a failed project." Taylor & Francis Online This tension between the decolonial critique of anticolonial movements and the need to recover the genuine insights and practices of anticolonial struggle is directly relevant for assessing Sikder's theoretical legacy.

From the decolonial perspective, Sikder's adoption of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as his primary theoretical framework represents a form of "epistemic dependence" on European-derived theoretical traditions, even though Maoism itself represents a partial "Sinicization" of

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European Marxism that already involved significant theoretical adaptation. The decolonial critique would argue that a genuinely decolonizing political project requires not merely the adaptation of European theoretical frameworks to local conditions but the development of genuinely alternative theoretical frameworks rooted in the specific intellectual traditions of the colonized people.

The practical implications of this critique for Sikder's specific project need to be considered carefully. The specific intellectual resources of Bengali political thought, including the tradition of peasant resistance, the intellectual current of Islamic modernism represented by figures like Muhammad Iqbal, and the literary and cultural tradition of Bengali intellectual life, did offer potential resources for a more genuinely indigenous theoretical framework. But developing a coherent and politically effective revolutionary theory that drew primarily on these indigenous resources, rather than on the already-elaborated framework of Marxism-Leninism, was an enormous intellectual undertaking that would have required much more time and political breathing room than Sikder had available to him.

The most honest assessment is that Sikder's adoption of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as his primary theoretical framework, while not adequately sensitive to the epistemic limitations and cultural distance of this framework, was a pragmatically reasonable choice given the specific historical moment and the available intellectual resources. The analytical tools that the Maoist framework provided, particularly its class analysis and its theory of the colonial relationship, were more developed and more immediately applicable than the nascent resources of indigenous Bengali political thought, and using them enabled Sikder to produce a more systematic and politically effective analysis than would have been possible without them.

CHAPTER THIRTY: SIKDER'S THEORETICAL WRITINGS: A CLOSE READING

30.1 The 1968 EBWM Thesis: Structure, Arguments, and Significance

The foundational document of Siraj Sikder's theoretical project, the "Thesis of the East Bengal Workers Movement" written in 1968 and revised and expanded in December of that year, deserves a sustained close reading that goes beyond the summary treatment given in earlier chapters. The document, available in English translation at the Marxists Internet Archive, is a genuinely remarkable piece of political analysis that rewards careful textual examination.

The thesis begins with a historical survey of the contradictions of Indian society under British colonial rule, establishing the framework within which the specific situation of East Bengal under Pakistani rule is to be understood. This historical opening is methodologically significant: it situates the specific analysis within a long historical arc that connects the current situation to the deep structures of colonial exploitation and class struggle that have shaped South Asian society over centuries. This long-historical approach, which parallels the approach of this textbook itself, reflects Sikder's genuine historical consciousness and his understanding that

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specific political situations can only be adequately analyzed when their historical roots are understood.

The thesis then identifies the four "basic contradictions" of Indian society in the colonial period: between the Indian people and British colonialism, between the peasantry and feudalism, between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and among the imperialist powers themselves. This framework of multiple contradictions in specific hierarchical relationship to one another is central to the Maoist dialectical analysis of social formations, and Sikder applies it with considerable skill to the specific Bengali situation.

The most original and analytically powerful section of the thesis is the argument for the colonial character of East Bengal's relationship to Pakistan. Sikder does not merely assert this claim but argues for it through a detailed analysis of the specific mechanisms of economic extraction, political exclusion, and cultural subordination that characterize the relationship. The specific data points he adduces, the differential in per capita public investment between east and west wings, the dominance of West Pakistanis in the civil service and military, the attempt to impose Urdu as the sole national language, the structural disadvantage of East Pakistan's trading terms with the west, constitute a substantial evidential case for the structural argument.

Sikder's identification of the "principal contradiction" in East Bengal's situation as the contradiction between the Pakistani bureaucratic bourgeoisie and feudalists on one side and the people of East Bengal on the other is both his most important analytical claim and his most consequential strategic conclusion. The identification of this principal contradiction determines the revolutionary strategy: the primary task is to resolve this contradiction through national liberation from Pakistani colonial rule, and all other contradictions (the internal class contradictions of East Bengali society) are secondary and should be subordinated to the national liberation task at the current historical stage.

The document's treatment of revolutionary strategy draws directly on Mao's theory of protracted people's war, including the specific prescription for guerrilla warfare in the rural areas and the establishment of base areas. As we have analyzed in detail in earlier chapters, this strategic prescription was problematic in its application to the specific geographic conditions of East Bengal. But within the logic of the Maoist framework that Sikder was applying, the prescription followed coherently from the analysis of the social formation and the identification of the principal contradiction.

30.2 The "Heroic People of East Bengal" Document: Propaganda, Analysis, and Political Communication

The 1974 document "Heroic People of East Bengal, Our Struggle Has Not Yet Finished," written in the final year of Sikder's life and representing one of his last significant theoretical statements, provides important insight into both the political analysis and the political communication style of the PBSP at the point when the movement was under its most intense pressure.

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The document's title itself is significant: the address to the "heroic people of East Bengal" positions the argument within a framework of popular address and mass communication that is quite different from the more technical theoretical language of the 1968 thesis. By the period of this document, Sikder had learned the importance of communicating with a broader audience than the narrow circle of committed Maoist cadres who were the primary audience for the theoretical documents of the earlier period.

The document's political analysis focused on the failures of the Mujib government, particularly in the context of the 1974 famine, and argued that these failures demonstrated the class character of the comprador bourgeois government and the necessity of continuing the revolutionary struggle. The analysis of the famine as a class phenomenon, a product of the government's indifference to the interests of the poor and its service of the interests of grain merchants and speculators, anticipated the academic analysis that Amartya Sen would develop in more formal terms several years later and demonstrated the analytical capacity of Sikder's political economy framework.

The document also contained important strategic reflections on the PBSP's situation, acknowledging the organizational difficulties the party was facing while arguing that these difficulties were temporary and that the conditions for revolutionary advance remained. Reading this document in the knowledge that Sikder would be arrested and killed within months of writing it is a haunting experience: the confidence and clarity of the political analysis is counterpointed against the organizational reality that the PBSP was in serious decline.

30.3 Polemical Writings and the Construction of Revolutionary Identity

A significant portion of Sikder's theoretical writings consists of polemical documents directed against rival political organizations: the "Exposure" document against the East Bengal Communist Party, the document on the differences with the Huq-Toha group, and various other critiques of competing Maoist and left organizations in Bangladesh. These polemical writings occupy a complex place in the assessment of Sikder's theoretical legacy.

On one hand, the polemical writings served important theoretical functions. They were forums in which Sikder worked out the specific positions and arguments that distinguished the PBSP's political line from those of competing organizations, and in doing so, he often produced his most detailed and specific analyses of particular theoretical questions. The "Exposure" document's analysis of the class character of the independence movement and the post-independence state is, for example, one of the most detailed articulations of the PBSP's core theoretical position, and it was the specific challenge of the rival organization's positions that forced Sikder to develop this analysis with the specificity and rigor that the document demonstrates.

On the other hand, the polemical writings also contributed to the political fragmentation and organizational rivalry that characterized the Bangladeshi Maoist movement and that diverted political energy from the primary tasks of mass organizing and revolutionary development. The specific accusations of revisionism, neo-revisionism, Trotskyism, and Guevarism that pepper the

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polemical documents were politically charged characterizations that foreclosed the possibility of unity or cooperation with organizations that shared many of the PBSP's basic political commitments.

The broader pattern of sectarian fragmentation that characterized the global Maoist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, including the extraordinary proliferation of competing organizations each claiming to represent the authentic revolutionary line, was a significant organizational weakness of the movement as a whole. Sikder's polemical writings were both symptoms and contributors to this pattern. The theoretical energy invested in distinguishing the PBSP's specific positions from those of the Huq-Toha group or the East Bengal Communist Party would, from a purely organizational perspective, have been better invested in building the mass political organizations through which the revolutionary project could have been advanced more effectively.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: SIKDER'S LEGACY FOR CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH AND THE SOUTH ASIAN LEFT

31.1 Post-Uprising Bangladesh: The Political Moment of 2025 and 2026

The July 2024 uprising that toppled the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina has created a political moment in Bangladesh of extraordinary significance, one that demands analysis in relation to the theoretical questions that Sikder's work raised. In August 2025, the interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus unveiled the July Declaration, a political manifesto framed as a blueprint for democratic reform that acknowledged the struggle of the people, denounced Sheikh Hasina's autocratic rule, and called for justice, accountability, and institutional reconstruction. Postcolonialpolitics

The specific political dynamics of the post-uprising moment illuminate several of the analytical questions that Sikder's theoretical framework raised. First, the class character of the uprising itself: the July 2024 uprising was not a proletarian revolution in the Marxist sense, nor was it a peasant uprising in the Maoist sense. It was a primarily urban mass movement led by students and joined by workers and ordinary citizens, which achieved its immediate objective (the removal of the Hasina government) through mass civil disobedience and the willingness of demonstrators to face state violence with their bodies. The uprising's social composition, including significant participation from middle-class students at private universities alongside public university students, workers, and informal sector laborers, reflected the complex class dynamics of contemporary Bangladesh that Sikder's framework did not fully anticipate.

Second, the question of what the uprising achieved and what remains unresolved: the uprising successfully removed the most immediately oppressive dimension of the existing political order, the Hasina government's authoritarian consolidation of power. But it did not resolve the deeper structural questions of class power, land distribution, labor rights, and economic inequality that Sikder identified as the central problems of Bengali society. Following the political upheaval of

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2024 to 2025, a Constitutional Reform Commission proposed the removal of secularism, socialism, and nationalism from the constitution, signaling a decisive rupture from the nation's founding principles. ResearchGate This constitutional proposal, which reflects the complex ideological politics of the post-uprising moment, illustrates that the political space opened by the uprising is being contested between multiple forces with very different visions of what Bangladesh should become.

Third, the question of political organization: the post-uprising emergence of the National Citizen Party (Jatiya Nagarik Party), the student-led organization that has sought to translate the uprising's political energy into a new political force, illustrates both the continuing need for organized political parties and the difficulty of building genuinely democratic and accountable political organizations in the post-uprising context. Bangladeshi parties in early 2025 encountered heightened existential fear as a new students-led National Citizen Party epitomized "anti-elitist thunder" that resonated since Hasina's autocracy tumbled, while traditional political actors like the BNP faced uncertainty about the future of political power. Eurasia Review

31.2 Sikder's Analytical Framework and the Post-Uprising Political Economy

Applying Sikder's analytical framework to the specific political economy of post-uprising Bangladesh reveals both its continuing analytical power and its specific limitations for the contemporary context.

The colonial thesis's descendant, the analysis of the Bangladeshi state as a vehicle for class exploitation whose specific forms have changed since Sikder's time but whose essential character has not, retains significant analytical power. The post-uprising revelations of the specific mechanisms of elite capture under the Hasina government, including the systematic allocation of public contracts, banking licenses, and economic opportunities to politically connected business groups, the use of state security forces to suppress labor organizing, and the structuring of trade policy to benefit the garment industry's ownership class at the expense of workers, are all consistent with the fundamental thesis that the Bangladeshi state serves primarily the interests of a propertied class rather than those of the broad population.

The comprador analysis requires significant updating, however, to be adequate to the contemporary context. The specific mechanisms through which Bangladesh's political economy is integrated into the global capitalist system have changed substantially since Sikder's time. The garment industry's integration into global value chains, the significant role of remittances from the Bangladeshi diaspora in the Middle East and elsewhere, the influence of international financial institutions including the IMF and World Bank in shaping Bangladesh's macroeconomic policy, and the specific geopolitical alignment of Bangladesh between India, China, and the United States, all reflect a more complex and more globally integrated political economy than the simple comprador model captures.

The land question, which Sikder identified as central to any genuinely emancipatory political programme, remains unresolved in contemporary Bangladesh in ways that the post-uprising

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political moment is not adequately addressing. The land distribution situation has actually worsened in some respects since Sikder's time: urbanization and industrial development have created new forms of land dispossession, with poor communities in Dhaka's informal settlements and in rural areas adjacent to export processing zones subjected to forced displacement that echoes the historical dispossessions of the zamindar period.

31.3 The Question of Violence in the Post-Uprising Context

One of the most direct connections between Sikder's legacy and the contemporary political moment is the question of political violence. The July 2024 uprising involved state violence on a significant scale: approximately one thousand people were killed by police, paramilitary forces, and affiliated political organizations in the weeks of protests before Hasina's ouster. The question of what forms of resistance were legitimate in response to this state violence, and how the experience of state violence shaped the uprising's political dynamics, are directly connected to the theoretical questions about the justification of political violence that Sikder's life raised.

As the Jamhoor article on Sikder's legacy published in May 2025 argues, Sikder's legacy "does not answer broadly whether a revolutionary should choose violence; rather, it breaks this binary and suggests that the question should be when and why the oppressed choose violent resistance instead." Jamhoor This formulation, which captures something important about Sikder's theoretical contribution, is also directly relevant to the July 2024 experience. The uprising's demonstrators chose primarily nonviolent resistance in the face of state violence, a tactical choice that proved extraordinarily effective in moral and political terms. But their willingness to stand their ground in the face of live ammunition was itself a form of political courage that involved accepting the risk of violent death, and the boundary between passive resistance and active resistance was not always clear in specific situations.

The post-uprising political debates about accountability for the violence of the Hasina period have engaged directly with questions of justice, law, and political responsibility that Sikder's life also raised. The demand for accountability for the killings of demonstrators, and the broader demand for accountability for fifteen years of authoritarian governance, reflects the same fundamental commitment to the rule of law and the protection of human rights that makes Sikder's own killing a continuing demand for justice.

31.4 Synthesis: What Sikder's Theoretical Legacy Offers the Contemporary Left

After the comprehensive theoretical analysis of this Part, it is appropriate to offer a synthesizing assessment of what Sikder's theoretical legacy specifically offers the contemporary South Asian left, and particularly the contemporary Bangladeshi left, as an intellectual resource.

The most important element of Sikder's theoretical legacy is his insistence on the structural analysis of political and economic power. Against the tendency of liberal politics to treat political outcomes as primarily the product of individual decisions, institutional design, and cultural values, Sikder insisted on analyzing the structural conditions, the class relations, the

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colonial inheritances, the specific mechanisms of economic extraction and political exclusion, that determine what is possible within specific political systems. This structural analysis, which can be developed and enriched through engagement with subsequent theoretical traditions including postcolonial theory, dependency theory, and contemporary political economy, remains the most important methodological contribution of his theoretical project.

The second important element is his insistence on the specificity of the national question within the class struggle. Against the tendency of some Marxist traditions to treat national identity as a mere epiphenomenon of class relations, and against the tendency of nationalist politics to treat national identity as transcendent of class, Sikder insisted on analyzing the specific ways in which national oppression and class exploitation are simultaneously distinct and interrelated. This analytical insistence, which produced his most original theoretical contribution in the colonial thesis, provides an important corrective to both economic reductionism and nationalist idealism.

The third important element is his commitment to the agency of the most marginalized. Against the tendency of elite-led politics, whether nationalist or reformist, to treat the poor and the landless as passive objects of political benevolence rather than active subjects of their own liberation, Sikder insisted on building a politics that genuinely centered the experience and the interests of those who had nothing. This commitment, whatever its specific organizational failures, represents a moral and political standard against which all contemporary left politics must measure itself.

The fourth important element, and the one that has the most direct relevance for the post-uprising Bangladesh of 2025 and 2026, is his analysis of the relationship between formal democracy and genuine social justice. Sikder's insistence that formal electoral democracy, without the structural transformation of class power, cannot deliver genuine political equality or economic justice for the working class and the poor was validated by the history of the Awami League's governance: a party that repeatedly won free elections while governing in the interests of a specific class fraction and systematically excluding the working class and rural poor from genuine political power. The post-uprising moment, which has opened the possibility of genuine democratic renewal in Bangladesh, requires exactly the kind of structural analysis that Sikder was developing if it is to avoid reproducing the patterns of elite capture and popular exclusion that characterized the pre-uprising political order.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: THEORETICAL CROSSROADS: SIKDER, AMBEDKAR, AND THE MULTIPLE OPPRESSIONS

32.1 The Missing Conversation: Caste, Class, and Colonial Power

One of the most significant theoretical lacunae in Siraj Sikder's intellectual project is the absence of any systematic engagement with caste as a dimension of social oppression and political organization. This absence is worth examining carefully because it reveals both a significant

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limitation of the Maoist theoretical framework as applied to South Asian conditions and a broader intellectual horizon that the contemporary assessment of Sikder's legacy must address.

B.R. Ambedkar, the brilliant jurist and political philosopher who led India's Dalit liberation movement and who was among the most important intellectual figures of twentieth-century South Asia, developed a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding caste oppression that was simultaneously a critique of colonial power and a critique of the mainstream Indian independence movement's failure to address caste inequality. Ambedkar's theoretical framework, which combined juridical analysis, political economy, and social philosophy, produced insights about the relationship between legal structures and social oppression that are directly relevant to the questions that Sikder was analyzing.

The absence of engagement with Ambedkar's framework in Sikder's theoretical writings is partly explained by the specific intellectual formation of East Bengali Maoism, which drew primarily on the Chinese and international Maoist tradition rather than on the specifically South Asian intellectual tradition that Ambedkar represented. It is also partly explained by the specific social conditions of East Bengal, where the Muslim-majority population's experience of caste was different from the Hindu caste system of the broader Indian subcontinent, and where the caste question was not as politically salient as it was in the Hindu-majority regions of India.

But the absence is also a genuine theoretical limitation. The dalits and other marginalized communities who experienced multiple, interlocking forms of oppression, caste, class, gender, and colonial exclusion simultaneously, were among the most marginalized groups in South Asian society, and a theoretical framework that could not adequately account for the specific forms of their oppression was incomplete as an account of the full range of social exploitation that a genuinely emancipatory politics needed to address.

32.2 The Legal Legacy of Ambedkar and Its Relevance for Sikder's Project

Ambedkar's contribution to Indian constitutional jurisprudence, as the principal drafter of the Indian Constitution and as a thinker who devoted enormous intellectual energy to the question of how law could be used as an instrument of social emancipation rather than social oppression, provides important resources for enriching the jurisprudential dimensions of Sikder's political project.

Ambedkar's approach to constitutional design reflected his understanding, derived from his own experience of caste discrimination, that formal legal equality before the law is insufficient to produce genuine social equality when the social structures that produce inequality are not directly addressed by the legal order. His advocacy for specific constitutional provisions that would affirmatively protect and advance the interests of historically marginalized groups, including the system of reservations in public employment and education for scheduled castes and tribes, represented an early articulation of what contemporary constitutional theory calls "substantive equality": the idea that genuine legal equality requires attending to the specific conditions that produce inequality rather than simply prohibiting formal discrimination.

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This concept of substantive equality, which Ambedkar developed in the Indian constitutional context, is directly relevant to the assessment of the Bangladeshi constitutional framework that Sikder was criticizing. The 1972 Bangladeshi Constitution's formal commitments to equality, rights, and the emancipation of toiling masses were commitments to formal legal equality that did not include the specific affirmative mechanisms that Ambedkar's framework would suggest were necessary to produce genuine social equality. The gap between formal constitutional equality and substantive social equality was precisely what Sikder's class analysis was pointing toward, even though he was using a different theoretical vocabulary.

The convergence between Sikder's class-based critique of formal equality and Ambedkar's caste-based critique of formal equality is theoretically important and productively extends the scope of analysis that either framework alone provides. A synthesis of the two frameworks, which took seriously both the class analysis of economic exploitation and the specific additional dimensions of caste, gender, and religious oppression that intersect with class in complex and non-reducible ways, would be more adequate to the full complexity of South Asian social oppression than either framework alone.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: DIALECTICS, CONTRADICTION, AND REVOLUTIONARY KNOWLEDGE

33.1 Mao's "On Contradiction" and Sikder's Application

Mao Zedong's 1937 philosophical essay "On Contradiction" was one of the most important theoretical texts in Sikder's intellectual formation, and understanding its specific philosophical claims and their implications for Sikder's political analysis is essential for any comprehensive philosophical assessment of his theoretical legacy.

"On Contradiction" is a philosophical essay in the tradition of Marxist dialectics, drawing on Engels's "Dialectics of Nature" and Lenin's "Philosophical Notebooks" to develop a theory of contradiction as the fundamental dynamic principle of all things in the world. Mao argues that every thing and every process contains internal contradictions, opposing forces or tendencies that are in tension with one another, and that the development of any thing or process is driven by the development and resolution of these internal contradictions.

Mao's most distinctive contribution in "On Contradiction" is the distinction between the "principal contradiction" and secondary contradictions. In any complex phenomenon containing multiple contradictions, one contradiction plays the "principal and decisive" role in determining the character of the whole, while other contradictions play secondary roles. The identification of the principal contradiction at any given stage of development is the key analytical task for revolutionary strategy: it determines which forces are the primary allies and which are the primary enemies, what the primary objective of political action should be, and which secondary

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contradictions can be temporarily set aside in order to concentrate forces on resolving the principal contradiction.

Sikder's application of this Maoist analytical framework to East Bengal's situation, as we have analyzed in detail throughout this textbook, produced the colonial thesis: the argument that the principal contradiction was the contradiction between the Bengali people and Pakistani colonial rule, and that all other contradictions (class contradictions within East Bengali society, contradictions between different fractions of the Bengali bourgeoisie) were secondary at the current stage and must be subordinated to the task of resolving the principal contradiction through national liberation.

The philosophical question that this application raises is whether the concept of "principal contradiction" and the strategic framework it implies are philosophically adequate to the complexity of the actual social situation. The identification of a single "principal" contradiction necessarily simplifies a reality that contains multiple, simultaneously developing contradictions that influence one another in complex ways. The risk of this simplification is that it produces a strategic framework that is blind to the ways in which secondary contradictions constrain and condition the development of the principal contradiction.

In Sikder's specific application, the most significant strategic cost of the principal contradiction framework was the tendency to subordinate the internal class contradictions of East Bengali society, including the contradiction between the Bengali bourgeoisie and the working class, to the anti-colonial national liberation struggle. This subordination was strategically justified within the Maoist framework as appropriate to the current historical stage. But it also meant that the PBSP was consistently reluctant to challenge the class power of the Bengali bourgeoisie during the liberation war period, for fear of disrupting the national united front against Pakistani colonialism, and this reluctance made it more difficult for the party to develop the mass class-based organization that would have been necessary for effective post-independence revolutionary action.

33.2 The Epistemology of Revolutionary Knowledge: Practice, Theory, and Truth

Mao's "On Practice" (1937), the companion philosophical essay to "On Contradiction," develops an epistemological framework that grounds theoretical knowledge in practical activity and emphasizes the constant dialectical relationship between theory and practice in the production of genuine knowledge. This epistemological framework has important implications for the assessment of Sikder's theoretical work.

Mao argues, following the tradition of Marxist practice theory associated with Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" and Lenin's "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism," that genuine knowledge is not produced through abstract theoretical reflection alone but through the active engagement with the material world in which human beings transform both the world and themselves. Revolutionary knowledge, specifically, is produced through the practice of revolutionary struggle: the party's

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theory must be tested against and revised in light of the experience of mass political work, military struggle, and organizational development.

Applied to Sikder's theoretical project, this epistemological framework raises the question of how adequately the PBSP's theory was tested against and revised in light of the party's practical experience. The 1968 thesis was an elaborate theoretical document that drew on the Maoist framework and applied it to the specific conditions of East Bengal, but it was produced before the PBSP had accumulated significant practical experience of the specific challenges of organizing in the Bengali delta. The subsequent experience of the liberation war, the post-independence armed struggle, and the organizational crisis of the period from 1973 to 1975 provided enormous quantities of practical evidence about the specific challenges and limitations of the PBSP's strategy. The question is whether Sikder and the party leadership engaged in the kind of systematic theoretical revision in light of this practical experience that Mao's epistemological framework required.

The honest assessment, based on the available evidence, is that the theoretical revision in light of practical experience was incomplete. The core strategic framework, protracted people's war in the specific form derived from the Chinese case, was not fundamentally revised in light of the evidence that the specific geographic and social conditions of the Bengal delta made the direct application of that strategy extremely difficult. This constitutes a failure of the epistemological standard that Mao's own philosophy prescribed, a failure to genuinely learn from practice rather than simply continuing to apply the theory despite contradictory evidence.

33.3 Hegel, Marx, and the Dialectic of Liberation

The deeper philosophical foundation of Sikder's Maoist framework is the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic, and engaging with this foundation helps to illuminate both the philosophical strengths and limitations of his theoretical project.

Hegel's dialectic, as developed in the "Phenomenology of Spirit" (1807) and the "Science of Logic" (1812 to 1816), describes the development of consciousness and of historical reality through a process of contradiction and resolution: the "thesis" produces its opposite or "antithesis," and the tension between the two is resolved in a "synthesis" that incorporates elements of both while transcending the limitations of each. Marx's inversion of Hegel, the materialist dialectic that locates the driving force of historical development not in the self-movement of Spirit but in the contradictions of material productive forces and social relations, produced the foundational framework of Marxist historical analysis.

The specifically emancipatory dimension of the Marxist dialectic, the idea that the contradictions of capitalist society, including the contradiction between the socialized character of production and the private character of its appropriation, produce the conditions for their own resolution through the revolutionary action of the proletariat, is what grounds Marxist theory's claim to provide not merely an interpretation of history but a guide to its transformation. This emancipatory dimension was central to Sikder's political commitment: his conviction that the

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contradictions of Pakistani colonial rule and the class structure of East Bengali society were not merely descriptions of oppression but dynamic forces that, properly organized and led, would produce the revolutionary transformation that would end that oppression.

The most profound philosophical challenge to this emancipatory dialectic in the contemporary period comes from the work of thinkers in the tradition of critical theory, including the Frankfurt School and its successors, who have questioned whether the dialectic of liberation actually produces liberation or whether, in specific historical conditions, it can produce new forms of domination. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (1944) argued that the Enlightenment's emancipatory promise had been perverted into new forms of domination through the very rationalist and instrumental forms of thought that were supposed to produce liberation. This critique, while directed primarily at the Enlightenment rather than at Marxism specifically, has clear implications for the assessment of whether revolutionary organizations like the PBSP, which operated through highly rationalist and instrumental forms of organizational practice, could genuinely realize the emancipatory dialectic they claimed to embody.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF KEY THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PART FOUR

1968: Siraj Sikder produces the foundational theoretical document of the EBWM, articulating the colonial thesis, the principal contradiction framework, and the strategy of protracted people's war.

1971 to 1975: Sikder produces the major theoretical documents of the PBSP period, including the draft constitution, the "Exposure" document, the polemic against the Huq-Toha group, and "Heroic People of East Bengal."

1976: Death of Mao Zedong; Deng Xiaoping's reforms begin the transformation of Chinese socialism that the global Maoist movement experiences as capitalist restoration.

1980s: Development of the Subaltern Studies project in South Asian historiography; publication of the first volumes of "Subaltern Studies" under Ranajit Guha's editorship.

1983: Benedict Anderson publishes "Imagined Communities."

1988: Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" published.

1996: Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launches its people's war.

2000: Dipesh Chakrabarty publishes "Provincializing Europe."

2006: Nepalese Maoist people's war concludes with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

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2009: Jodi Dean publishes "Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies" (and subsequently "The Communist Horizon" in 2012 and "Crowds and Party" in 2016).

2019: Adom Getachew publishes "Worldmaking after Empire."

2024: CPI (Maoist) in India faces major setbacks as counterinsurgency intensifies; Bangladeshi July uprising topples Hasina government; PBSP holds its Fifth Party Congress.

January 2025: Fiftieth anniversary of Sikder's death; widespread commemorations; renewed scholarly and political interest in his legacy.

2025: Indian government effectively declares victory over the Naxalite insurgency as it contracts to 12 most-affected districts; in Bangladesh, Sikder's tactics resurface in "niche Maoist analyses as cautionary exemplars of ideological rigidity versus adaptive mobilization, amid interim governance debates favoring electoral over insurgent strategies." Grokipedia

2026: Continuing post-uprising political transition in Bangladesh under interim government of Muhammad Yunus; constitutional reform debates; uncertain path toward elections.

GLOSSARY FOR PART FOUR

Coloniality of knowledge: The term developed by decolonial theorists Mignolo and Quijano for the way in which European epistemological frameworks established themselves as universally valid standards of knowledge while marginalizing and delegitimizing non-European ways of knowing.

Decolonial theory: The theoretical tradition associated with the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) research network, which argues that colonial domination operates through the imposition of specific European ways of knowing, categorizing, and valuing the world, and that genuine decolonization requires epistemic as well as political and economic transformation.

Dependency theory: The theoretical tradition, developed primarily in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, which argues that the underdevelopment of peripheral economies is the direct product of their incorporation into a world capitalist system that structures their development to serve the interests of the metropolitan core.

Internal colonialism: The analytical concept applied to colonial-type relationships within the formal borders of a single state, in which a dominant regional or ethnic group systematically exploits and subordinates a weaker group through a combination of economic extraction, political exclusion, and cultural domination.

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Iron law of oligarchy: Roberto Michels's sociological observation that all large organizations, regardless of their democratic commitments, tend to develop concentrated leadership structures whose primary interest becomes the maintenance of their own power.

July Declaration: The political manifesto released by Bangladesh's interim government in August 2025, outlining a programme for democratic reform and institutional reconstruction following the July 2024 uprising.

National Citizen Party (Jatiya Nagarik Party): The student-led political organization that emerged from the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, representing an attempt to translate the uprising's political energy into a new political force independent of both the Awami League and the BNP.

Postcolonial theory: The interdisciplinary field of study concerned with the cultural, political, and economic consequences of colonialism and imperialism, associated particularly with scholars including Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

Principal contradiction: Mao Zedong's analytical concept identifying the contradiction that plays the "principal and decisive" role in determining the character of a complex situation, in relation to which all other contradictions play secondary roles at the current stage of development.

Provincializing Europe: Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept and book title referring to the intellectual project of recognizing European historical and theoretical frameworks as situated products of specific historical and geographical traditions rather than universally valid frameworks applicable without qualification to all societies.

Substantive equality: The constitutional and jurisprudential concept, associated with Ambedkar's analysis, that genuine legal equality requires attending to the specific conditions that produce inequality rather than simply prohibiting formal discrimination.

World-systems theory: Immanuel Wallerstein's theoretical framework analyzing the world capitalist economy as a single integrated system with core, semi-periphery, and periphery positions, in which core-periphery inequalities are reproduced through the specific mechanisms of unequal exchange and capital accumulation.

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End of Part Four

Part Five: "Siraj Sikder in the Twenty-First Century: Legacy, Commemoration, Controversy, and the Unfinished Revolution" will follow.

A Note on Methodology and Sources for Part Four

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Part Four has drawn on a broad range of primary and secondary theoretical sources, aiming to situate Sikder's theoretical legacy within the widest possible context of relevant intellectual traditions. The primary texts of Sikder's theoretical writings, available through the Marxists Internet Archive and Sarbaharapath.com, have been read closely and engaged with seriously. The secondary theoretical literature spans postcolonial theory, dependency theory and world-systems analysis, organizational theory, comparative revolutionary studies, and political philosophy.

The engagement with recent scholarship published in 2024, 2025, and 2026 has been guided by online searches and by engagement with the specific developments, particularly the July 2024 uprising and its aftermath, that have made Sikder's legacy newly relevant in the contemporary Bangladeshi political context. Where specific claims about recent events and contemporary political developments are made, these are based on the most reliable available sources, cited in the text.

The theoretical assessments offered in this Part are the author's scholarly judgments, not established consensus positions. The field of revolutionary studies, postcolonial theory, and comparative political analysis is one of active debate, and many of the specific assessments offered here would be contested by scholars with different theoretical orientations or different interpretations of the historical evidence. The goal is to provide a framework for serious analytical engagement rather than to close down debate.

PART FIVE: SIRAJ SIKDER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: LEGACY, COMMEMORATION, CONTROVERSY, AND THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

Preface to Part Five

The four preceding parts of this textbook have traced the full arc of Siraj Sikder's life and thought: the deep historical and colonial roots of Bengali society from which his political consciousness emerged, the making of his revolutionary mind through education and political formation at BUET and in the clandestine left movements of East Pakistan, the founding of the East Bengal Workers Movement and then the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party, the liberation war and the post-independence armed struggle, the jurisprudence of his killing and the philosophy of his martyrdom, and the theoretical legacy of his Maoist revolutionary project in relation to postcolonial theory, dependency theory, organizational theory, and the comparative study of South Asian revolutionary movements.

Part Five is the culmination of this entire intellectual enterprise. It asks the question that all serious historical and theoretical engagement must ultimately address: what does it all mean now? What does the life, thought, and death of Siraj Sikder mean for Bangladesh as it stands in

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April 2026, having just completed its first general election since the July 2024 uprising that ended fifteen years of Awami League authoritarian rule? What does his legacy mean for the South Asian left as it confronts the combined challenges of deepening economic inequality, environmental crisis, political fragmentation, and the continuing subordination of working-class interests to those of comprador elites? What does it mean for the global project of thinking seriously about justice, revolution, and the conditions under which genuine social transformation is possible?

This Part approaches these questions through several interconnected analytical threads. The first is contemporary: a detailed analysis of the specific ways in which Sikder's memory and legacy have been actively contested and mobilized in the political moment of 2024 to 2026, including the extraordinary episode of his graffiti at Dhaka University, the fifty-first death anniversary commemorations of January 2026, and the debates about his significance in the post-uprising political environment. The second is historical: a comprehensive assessment of the fifty-one years since his death, examining how the trajectories of Bangladeshi politics and society over that period relate to the analytical framework he developed. The third is philosophical: an extended meditation on the concept of the unfinished revolution, drawing on the philosophical traditions that have illuminated this concept most powerfully, from Benjamin's "redemptive remembrance" through to contemporary political philosophy's engagement with the politics of the impossible. The fourth is programmatic: an attempt to identify, with appropriate intellectual humility, what specific intellectual and political contributions Sikder's legacy can make to the ongoing project of building a more just world.

Throughout this Part, the author writes with the awareness that the relationship between historical scholarship and political commitment is complex and cannot be fully resolved. This textbook has sought to be analytically rigorous and politically honest, to acknowledge both the genuine contributions and the genuine failures of Sikder's project, to situate his thought within the broadest possible intellectual context, and to resist both hagiographic celebration and dismissive condemnation. Part Five continues this approach while also acknowledging that the historical questions raised by Sikder's life are not merely academic: they speak directly to the conditions of contemporary Bangladesh and to the enduring struggle for a more just world.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: WALLS THAT REMEMBER: SIKDER'S MEMORY IN THE POST-UPRISING POLITICAL SPACE

34.1 The Dhaka University Wall: A Microcosm of Political Contestation

Few episodes in the recent history of Bangladeshi political memory illustrate the contested character of Siraj Sikder's legacy with more clarity and intensity than the battles over his graffiti at Dhaka University in January 2025. These events, which unfolded in the specific political atmosphere of the fifty-year commemoration of his death and the post-uprising opening of Bangladeshi political culture, constitute a compressed and vivid case study in the politics of

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revolutionary memory, the dynamics of ideological contestation in public space, and the specific ways in which historical figures become battlegrounds for present-day political struggles.

The initial painting of a large mural of Sikder on a wall at the Dhaka University campus, adjacent to the university's central library, was one of the most visible expressions of the left's reclamation of political space that characterized the immediate post-uprising period. The large mural of Sikder, drawn after the Bloody July uprising over Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's mural in Dhaka University, suggested a restoration of his legacy as a defender of the proletariat. Jamhoor The specific act of painting Sikder's image over or beside the space previously occupied by Mujibur Rahman's image was a pointed political statement about the relationship between the two figures, the man who built and consolidated the post-independence Bangladeshi state and the man that state had killed.

The mural's existence was brief and violently contested. A group of over a hundred Dhaka University students marched from different halls and gathered at the Anti-Violence Raju Memorial Sculpture, then threw shoes at and erased the graffiti depicting Siraj Sikder in the central library area, chanting slogans such as "Set fire to the throne of red terror together." New Age The immediate trigger for this attack on the mural was a Facebook post by a student leader from the Bangladesh Chhatra Union who had written the phrase "the only option is red terror," a statement he subsequently said was meant to describe defensive violence in response to attacks on left activists, not an endorsement of terrorism. But the political dynamics that produced the attack ran much deeper than any single Facebook post.

The attack on the Sikder mural revealed the ideological fault lines within the post-uprising political space with unusual clarity. On one side were those who celebrated Sikder as a revolutionary martyr and defender of the proletariat, a symbol of the alternative to the Awami League's class politics that the uprising had opened space for. On the other side were those who characterized the PBSP's historical activities as "red terror," who linked left student organizations to the legacy of political violence, and who were anxious about the prospects of leftist influence in the post-uprising political environment. The specific phrase "red terror" echoed the title of Mohiuddin Ahmad's book on the Sarbahara Party and resonated with the anti-communist currents that were also active in the post-uprising political moment.

A group of students at Dhaka University early Wednesday recreated the erased portrait, with one student explaining: "We painted the original graffiti, but it was erased due to a controversial post. Now, we are recreating it." Another student of the DU anthropology department said, "After the mass uprising, those who admire the politics of Comrade Siraj Sikder spontaneously created the graffiti as a protest against the fascism of Awami League." New Age

The recreation of the mural, and the subsequent protest rally organized by the Shaheed Biplobi O Desh Premik Smriti Sangsad in front of the Bangladesh National Museum at Shahbagh, demonstrated both the resilience of the left's commitment to Sikder's memory and the precarious character of that commitment in the post-uprising political environment. The platform's general secretary, Tamiz Uddin, said that an extreme reactionary religious group was involved in erasing

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the graffiti of Siraj Sikder, while Progati Barman Tama of the Socialist Student Front noted that Siraj Sikder boldly stood against fascist rule of the Awami League and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and was killed for opposing Mujib. New Age

34.2 The Fifty-First Death Anniversary: Commemoration in a Transformed Political Landscape

The fifty-first death anniversary of Siraj Sikder, observed on January 2, 2026, took place in a political landscape that was more dramatically transformed than any in the preceding decades. The Awami League, which had governed Bangladesh for fifteen of the previous seventeen years and which had maintained a consistently hostile or dismissive posture toward Sikder's memory, was out of power and banned from political activity under anti-terrorism legislation. The interim government of Muhammad Yunus was conducting the political transition toward the April 2026 general election. And the political space for the left, including the organizations that regarded themselves as carrying Sikder's legacy, was more open than it had been in fifteen years.

The day's programmes for the fifty-first anniversary began by placing wreaths at Siraj Sikder's grave at Mohammadpur, led by Smriti Sangsad President Hasan Fakri. Activists later held a rally and brought out a red-flag procession from in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh and marched to the National Press Club. A discussion meeting was held at Bangladesh Shishu Kallyan Parishad auditorium, where speakers described Siraj Sikder and other Maoist revolutionaries as the country's finest sons. Dhaka Tribune

The political atmosphere of the fifty-first anniversary commemoration was shaped by the specific political dynamics of the post-uprising moment. The discussion meetings and rallies organized by left organizations on January 2, 2026, reflected a left political scene that was simultaneously energized by the opening of political space and fragmented by the complex ideological contestations of the post-uprising period. The relationship between the established left organizations that had long maintained Sikder's commemorative tradition and the new political forces that had emerged from the uprising, particularly the student organizations associated with the National Citizen Party and the Students Against Discrimination movement, was not one of simple alignment or simple antagonism.

The specific content of the commemorative meetings on January 2, 2026, as reported in the Bangladeshi press, reflected the left's attempt to connect Sikder's historical legacy to the present moment. Speakers at the commemoration events drew connections between the Mujib government's killing of Sikder and the Hasina government's killing of protesters in July 2024, arguing that the pattern of state violence against those who challenged the Awami League's power was not an aberration but a structural feature of that party's political practice across fifty years. They pointed to the continuing unresolved land question, the continuing exploitation of garment workers, and the continuing dominance of a propertied elite in the Bangladeshi state as evidence that the fundamental structural problems Sikder had identified remained unresolved half a century after his death.

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34.3 The Symbolic Politics of the Uprising and the Competition for Historical Memory

The July 2024 uprising produced an extraordinary transformation in the symbolic landscape of Bangladesh, as the statues, murals, and images of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that had dominated public space under the Hasina government were removed, defaced, or replaced with images representing the uprising's own martyrs and heroes. This transformation of the symbolic landscape created political space for the reemergence of suppressed or marginalized historical memories, including the memory of Siraj Sikder.

The politics of historical memory in post-uprising Bangladesh operates within a complex ideological field. The dominant symbolic politics of the uprising, as articulated by the Students Against Discrimination movement and subsequently by the National Citizen Party, emphasized the theme of "second independence": the uprising was presented as a completion of the unfinished promise of the 1971 liberation war, a reclamation of the country's founding ideals from the corruption and authoritarianism of the Awami League. This framework placed the uprising within the historical tradition of national liberation rather than within the tradition of class struggle, and it did not naturally accommodate the memory of a figure like Sikder, whose political project was explicitly in tension with the bourgeois nationalist tradition of the liberation war.

The left's commemoration of Sikder in the post-uprising moment was therefore both an assertion of its own historical narrative and a challenge to the dominant symbolic politics of the uprising. By insisting on Sikder's significance as a revolutionary who had anticipated and resisted the authoritarian tendencies of the Awami League from the beginning, and by connecting his killing by the Mujib government to the killings of protesters by the Hasina government, the left was offering an alternative historical narrative in which the Awami League's authoritarianism was not an aberration from its democratic founding but a structural feature of its class politics across the entire history of independent Bangladesh.

The ideological competition between these different historical narratives, the national liberation narrative of the dominant uprising politics and the class struggle narrative of the left's commemorative tradition, reflects a genuine ambiguity in the uprising's political character. The July 2024 uprising was simultaneously a pro-democracy movement fighting against authoritarian rule, a national liberation movement in the sense of reclaiming popular sovereignty from an elite that had captured the state, and a movement with significant class dimensions, given the prominent participation of workers and the poor in the uprising's most dangerous moments. Which of these dimensions is primary, and what political programme follows from the uprising's character, are questions that the post-uprising political contestation has not resolved.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: FIFTY YEARS OF HISTORY: THE VERDICT OF TIME ON SIKDER'S ANALYSIS

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35.1 The Trajectory of Bangladesh Since 1975: A Structural Assessment

The fifty-plus years since Siraj Sikder's death in January 1975 constitute an extraordinary historical experiment in the sense of providing an extended period against which the validity of his structural analysis can be assessed. The question is not whether Sikder's specific organizational and strategic choices were correct, which the preceding chapters have analyzed with considerable critical scrutiny, but whether the fundamental analytical framework he developed, his characterization of the Bangladeshi state as a vehicle for class exploitation and his identification of the structural conditions that would need to be transformed for genuine social liberation to be achieved, was validated or refuted by subsequent history.

The trajectory of Bangladesh since 1975 has been complex and in many respects contradictory. On aggregate economic indicators, Bangladesh has shown remarkable development: GDP per capita has grown more than tenfold since independence, the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty has fallen dramatically, life expectancy has increased substantially, and female education and workforce participation have expanded in ways that have genuinely transformed the material conditions of many Bangladeshi women. These are real achievements that deserve acknowledgment and that represent genuine improvements in human welfare by any serious measure.

At the same time, the distributional dimensions of this development have been profoundly consistent with Sikder's structural analysis. The gains from economic growth have been concentrated among a narrow elite of politically connected business families, while the workers and peasants who have generated that growth have received a far smaller share. The garment industry, which has become the backbone of Bangladesh's export economy, provides a particularly clear illustration of this distributional structure.

Bangladesh's garment sector earned about 47 billion dollars in the financial year before the uprising, amounting to 85 percent of annual exports and over 10 percent of GDP, yet workers in the sector were earning wages that even after increases remained far below what they needed to cover basic living expenses. World Socialist Web Site The industry employs around 4 million workers, more than 80 percent of them women, who face a variety of ongoing challenges including inadequate wages, precarious employment conditions, and systematic restrictions on trade union organizing. Lovely Yesmin

The political structure that has maintained this distributional arrangement has rotated between the Awami League and the BNP, with periodic military interventions, in a pattern of "competitive authoritarianism" that has consistently prioritized the interests of the propertied elite against those of the working class and the rural poor. Both major parties have maintained close relations with the garment industry's ownership class, have systematically restricted independent trade union organizing in that industry, and have used state violence to suppress workers' wage demands when those demands threatened the industry's profitability. The specific mechanisms have changed since Sikder's time, from the Rakkhi Bahini's direct political terror to

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the RAB's "crossfire" killings to the police violence against garment worker protesters, but the structural pattern has remained consistent.

The land question, which Sikder identified as central to genuine social transformation, has also evolved in ways that are broadly consistent with his structural analysis. Urbanization and industrial development have transformed the specific forms of the land question: the acute conflict over agricultural land that was the primary dimension in Sikder's time has been supplemented by new forms of land dispossession associated with industrial development, the expansion of export processing zones, and the dynamics of urban real estate in Dhaka and other cities. The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was a fallout of the expropriation of East Pakistan into an agrarian colony under the postcolonial Pakistani state, and the postcolonial nationhood scholarship from 2025 notes that even after independence, the ideological foundations of the Bangladeshi state remain contested and the struggles over land and belonging have never been fully resolved. ResearchGate

35.2 The Awami League: Fifty Years of Class Politics

The Awami League's fifty-year history in independent Bangladesh provides the most important single case study for evaluating Sikder's class analysis of that party. Sikder argued in 1972 that the Awami League was a party of the comprador bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie that would serve the interests of those classes rather than those of the working class and peasantry. The fifty-year record of Awami League governance, including the Mujib period (1972 to 1975), the first Hasina government (1996 to 2001), and the long Hasina period (2009 to 2024), provides substantial evidence for evaluating this claim.

The evidence broadly supports Sikder's class analysis at the level of structural tendency, while complicating it at the level of specific policy and political dynamics. The Awami League has consistently maintained its core social base in the Bengali Muslim commercial and professional class while also seeking to incorporate working-class and rural voters through nationalist appeals and developmental programmes. Its governance has been characterized by the systematic enrichment of politically connected business families through state contracts, banking licenses, and preferential access to economic opportunities, a pattern of elite capture that is precisely what the comprador analysis predicts.

At the same time, the Awami League's governance record includes genuine developmental achievements, including infrastructure development, expansion of education and healthcare, and significant poverty reduction, that complicate any simple characterization as pure comprador governance. The Padma Bridge, the metro rail, and the expansion of electricity access to rural areas are achievements of the Hasina government that represent genuine improvements in the material conditions of ordinary Bangladeshis, even if they were accompanied by massive corruption and served primarily as instruments of political legitimacy for a party that had foreclosed genuine democratic competition.

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The July 2024 uprising's verdict on the Awami League, expressed through the collective action of millions of Bangladeshis who were willing to face lethal state violence to demand the regime's end, represents the most powerful possible practical refutation of the party's claim to represent the interests of the Bengali people as a whole. The uprising's specific grievances, the quota system that had become a vehicle for Awami League patronage, the systematic rigging of elections, the economic inequality that had persisted despite aggregate growth, and the culture of political violence and impunity that characterized the Hasina government's treatment of its critics, are all aspects of the structural pattern that Sikder's class analysis had identified as inherent in the Awami League's political character.

35.3 Military Politics, Bureaucratic Power, and the Persistence of Elite Structures

Alongside the Awami League's class politics, the persistent role of the military and the bureaucracy as autonomous sources of power in Bangladesh's political system has been one of the most important structural features of the country's post-independence history. Understanding this role in relation to Sikder's analytical framework illuminates both the limitations of that framework and the enduring relevance of its structural approach.

The military's role in Bangladeshi politics has ranged from direct governance (under Ziaur Rahman and Ershad) to the background pressure that has shaped the possibilities of civilian governance throughout the post-independence period. The July 2024 uprising's relationship to the military is particularly instructive. The uprising succeeded partly because the military chose not to intervene to save the Hasina government, a decision that reflected the military's own assessment of its institutional interests rather than any commitment to democratic principles. The military's push for early elections after the uprising may have been driven by two key concerns: preserving the institutional framework established under Hasina and avoiding investigations into its involvement in human rights violations, particularly enforced disappearances. The Diplomat

This analysis of the military's motivations in the post-uprising transition is consistent with Sikder's structural approach, which emphasized the importance of understanding the specific class and institutional interests of the actors in the political system rather than accepting their stated motivations at face value. The military, like the Awami League and like every other political force in Bangladesh's post-independence history, has consistently acted in ways that serve the institutional and material interests of the military establishment, modifying its political alignments as necessary to protect those interests.

The bureaucratic elite, the senior civil servants who have administered the Bangladeshi state through successive political changes, represents another dimension of the structural continuity that Sikder's analysis pointed toward. The bureaucracy's interests, including its control of regulatory resources, its capacity to extract rents from the economic activities it supervises, and its institutional autonomy from democratic accountability, have been broadly consistent across changes of government and have constituted a significant obstacle to the kind of structural reform that would genuinely serve the interests of the poor.

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35.4 The Indian Dimension: From Expansionism to Strategic Competition

One of the most contentious and most historically significant dimensions of Sikder's analysis was his characterization of India as a "regional expansionist" power whose relationship to Bangladesh would be one of dominance rather than genuine solidarity. This characterization, which was extremely politically controversial at the time of the PBSP's founding and which seemed to many observers to be ideologically motivated rather than empirically grounded, has been revisited repeatedly in the light of the specific evolution of India-Bangladesh relations over fifty years.

The overall India-Bangladesh relationship has been one of the most complex and contested dimensions of Bangladeshi foreign policy throughout the post-independence period. The close relationship established under the Mujib government, formalized in the 1972 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace, has been a persistent source of political controversy in Bangladesh, with Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Islamist political forces consistently arguing that the relationship was asymmetrical and compromised Bangladeshi sovereignty. The Awami League's identification with India, and the Hasina government's particularly close relationship with the Modi government, became one of the most significant political liabilities of the Awami League's long tenure in power.

The post-uprising political moment has produced a significant reorientation of Bangladesh's external relationships. Under Yunus, Bangladesh is working to reduce its long-standing dependence on India, a hallmark of the Hasina era, and to diversify its foreign relations. Bangladesh-India ties have been strained by New Delhi ignoring requests to extradite Hasina, despite the two countries having an extradition treaty, and the interim government has sought to diversify Bangladesh's relations, pursuing talks and agreements across defence, tech and trade with China, Pakistan, Turkey, South Korea, and others. Chatham House

This post-uprising reorientation of Bangladesh's external relationships is not a vindication of Sikder's specific characterization of India as the primary external enemy of Bengali liberation, which was exaggerated and politically counterproductive in its time and remains an oversimplification in the present. But it does reflect the continuing relevance of the structural question that Sikder was raising: about the specific forms of asymmetrical power that characterize the relationship between a small, economically dependent state and the larger regional powers that surround it, and about what genuine national sovereignty requires in conditions of such asymmetry.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION: PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

36.1 Walter Benjamin's Angel and the Bangladesh of 2026

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The image of Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History," which we introduced in Part Three, provides a powerful and appropriate philosophical framework for understanding the relationship between Siraj Sikder's historical project and the Bangladesh of 2026. Benjamin's angel, blown backward into the future by the storm of progress while looking at the catastrophic pile of wreckage that is history, sees in that pile not the inevitable unfolding of historical necessity but the accumulated suffering of the defeated and the forgotten, and feels the obligation of redemptive memory toward them.

The Bangladesh of 2026, in the specific political moment of its first genuinely competitive general election since 2008, looks backward at a history that includes the liberation war of 1971, the killing of Sikder in 1975 and the introduction of BAKSAL, the military coups and the subsequent decades of political alternation between two parties that each embodied different dimensions of elite class rule, the garment industry's emergence as the engine of economic growth and the site of systematic labor exploitation, the long Hasina period's progressive authoritarianism culminating in the massacre of the July 2024 uprising, and the post-uprising transition with its complex mixture of democratic hope and continuing structural inequality.

From Benjamin's perspective, the obligation of historical memory in this moment is not to celebrate the "progress" that aggregate economic development represents, nor to simply condemn the catastrophes of the history. It is to preserve the experience and the claims of those who struggled and suffered, those who died in the liberation war, those who were killed by the Rakkhi Bahini, those who were shot by police in garment worker protests, those who fell in the streets of Dhaka and Chittagong in July 2024, and those like Siraj Sikder whose revolutionary projects failed but whose aspirations for a more just Bangladesh retain their moral validity and their claim on the present.

The specific contemporary resonance of this Benjaminian obligation is illustrated by the situation of Bangladesh's garment workers in the post-uprising moment. A garment worker who joined the deadly protests in 2024 wrote that the dreams workers carried into the July movement have been trampled: "The post-uprising government has maintained the same exploitative and oppressive system. Discussions are being held on what kind of universities students need or what democratic reforms are required, but no discussion on what kind of Bangladesh garment workers need." Netra

Despite their equal participation in the uprising, women garment workers found themselves sidelined and erased in the movement's aftermath. Garment worker and union leader Kalpona Akter noted: "Girls and women disappeared from the forefront after the revolution. Their voices were merely used to fuel the protests and then they were sidelined." Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

These testimonies from garment workers about their experience in the post-uprising moment echo, with remarkable structural similarity, the experience that Sikder and the PBSP were describing in 1972: the experience of working people whose participation in a liberation movement is essential to its success but whose specific interests and aspirations are subsequently

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marginalized by the class forces that take power through the movement's victory. The specific forms are different, a mass uprising against authoritarianism rather than a war of national liberation, a garment worker in a Dhaka factory rather than a landless peasant in the Barisal delta, but the structural dynamic that Sikder identified, the gap between the emancipatory promise of a liberation movement and the class-interested practice of the government that inherits that movement, remains powerfully operative.

36.2 The Concept of the Unfinished Revolution in Political Philosophy

The concept of the "unfinished revolution" has a distinguished tradition in political philosophy and in the historical analysis of revolutionary movements. Examining this tradition provides the philosophical framework for understanding what is at stake in describing Sikder's revolutionary project as an "unfinished revolution" rather than simply as a failed revolution.

The distinction between the "unfinished" and the "failed" revolution is more than a matter of political optimism. It reflects a specific understanding of the relationship between revolutionary projects and historical time. A failed revolution is one that did not achieve its objectives and whose failure reflects the objective impossibility of those objectives under the historical conditions in which the revolution was attempted. An unfinished revolution is one that pointed toward objectives that were genuinely achievable, that made partial progress toward those objectives, and that, despite organizational defeat, left behind a claim on history that future generations are obligated to address.

The philosophical framework that most powerfully illuminates this distinction is the one developed by Hannah Arendt in "On Revolution" (1963). Arendt argued that genuine revolution, as distinct from mere rebellion or coup, involves not just the destruction of the old order but the creation of something genuinely new: new political institutions, new forms of public life, new possibilities for human freedom and collective self-governance. In this framework, the incompleteness of a revolution is not simply a matter of organizational failure but reflects the genuine difficulty of the creative political task that revolution sets for itself: building new forms of political life that genuinely embody the emancipatory aspirations that animated the revolutionary struggle.

Applied to Sikder's revolutionary project, Arendt's framework suggests that the "unfinished" character of the revolution he sought to advance does not reflect simply the organizational failure of the PBSP or the superior military and political power of the state forces arrayed against it. It reflects the genuine difficulty of the political creative task that he was attempting: building a new form of political life in Bangladesh that would genuinely serve the interests of the working class and the peasantry, that would break with the colonial inheritance of exploitation and dependence, and that would demonstrate in practice that a different kind of social order was possible in the specific conditions of the Bengali delta.

This political creative task remains unfinished because the conditions that made it necessary, the systematic exploitation of the rural poor and the urban working class, the subordination of

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Bangladeshi development to the interests of international capital, the continuing inequality in access to land and resources, the political marginalization of the most vulnerable, have not been resolved. The specific organizational forms through which Sikder sought to address these conditions, the Leninist vanguard party, the strategy of protracted people's war, the specific alliance structures of the new democratic revolution, were inadequate to the task and need to be rethought for contemporary conditions. But the task itself remains as urgent as it was in 1968 or 1972.

36.3 The Politics of the Possible and the Ethics of Utopian Vision

One of the most persistent criticisms of the revolutionary left in general, and of Sikder's specific project in particular, is the charge of utopianism: the argument that the goals of the revolutionary programme are unrealistically ambitious given the actual balance of political and economic forces, and that the pursuit of these unrealistic goals produces political violence and organizational failure without advancing the genuine interests of the people it claims to serve. This criticism deserves serious engagement rather than simple dismissal.

The philosophical tradition of utopianism has a complex relationship to revolutionary politics. Ernst Bloch's "The Principle of Hope" (1954 to 1959) developed the concept of the "not yet," the dimension of reality that is genuinely possible but has not yet been realized, and argued that utopian imagination is not a flight from reality but an engagement with the real possibilities embedded in historical conditions. From Bloch's perspective, the charge of utopianism against revolutionary politics mistakes the historical possibility of a genuinely different social order for a mere fantasy: what revolutionary politics proposes as its goal is not an impossible dream but a genuine historical possibility that existing social arrangements actively prevent from being realized.

The philosopher Raymond Geuss, in "History and Illusion in Politics" (2001) and subsequent work, has developed a more skeptical account of the relationship between political ideals and political reality. Geuss argues that political ideals always need to be assessed in terms of their conditions of realization: what specific social conditions, organizational resources, and political strategies would be necessary for the ideal to be achieved, and how realistic is it that those conditions can be created. From this perspective, the charge of utopianism against Sikder's project is not that his goals were inherently impossible but that his analysis of the conditions necessary for their realization was inadequate: the strategy of protracted people's war in the specific conditions of the Bangladesh delta was not a realistic path to the realization of the new democratic revolution.

The most productive response to this tension between utopian aspiration and political realism is the approach developed by Erik Olin Wright in his "Envisioning Real Utopias" (2010): the systematic analysis of actually existing institutions and practices that embody, however partially and imperfectly, the principles of a more just social order, and the development of political strategies that seek to build on and expand these existing partial realizations rather than treating the revolutionary moment as a complete rupture with the existing order. This "real utopian"

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approach does not abandon the aspiration for fundamental social transformation but grounds that aspiration in specific analysis of existing possibilities rather than in the abstract assertion of historical necessity.

Applied to Sikder's legacy, the "real utopian" approach would ask: what specific existing institutions and practices in Bangladesh most closely embody the principles of working-class and peasant empowerment that Sikder's programme sought to advance? What would it mean to build on these existing partial realizations rather than waiting for the revolutionary moment of total transformation? And what specific organizational forms would be adequate to this strategy in the conditions of contemporary Bangladesh?

36.4 The Question of Violence: A Final Philosophical Reckoning

In bringing this textbook toward its conclusion, it is appropriate to return one final time to the question of political violence, which has been one of the central ethical and political problems raised by Sikder's legacy throughout the preceding chapters. The recent history of Bangladesh, specifically the state violence of the July 2024 uprising, provides new and immediate grounds for this final philosophical engagement.

The July 2024 uprising was met with lethal state violence that killed approximately one thousand people and wounded tens of thousands. The BBC reporting and UN findings documented abuses that verge on crimes against humanity. Postcolonialpolitics The demonstrators who faced this violence were overwhelmingly unarmed civilians who chose to stand their ground against lethal force with remarkable courage and at enormous cost. Their willingness to do so, and the moral clarity of their resistance to an unjust state power that was killing them, raises in the most immediate possible terms the philosophical questions about the relationship between nonviolent and violent resistance to state violence that Sikder's life also posed.

The most careful recent philosophical engagement with this question, which directly addresses the Bangladesh context, is found in the Jamhoor article's analysis of Sikder's legacy published in May 2025. The article argues that "Siraj Sikder and his Purba Bangla Sarbahara Party showed that the question should not be whether the oppressed should be non-violent or not; rather, it should be what conditions force the people to resist violently to achieve freedom. That history shows the necessity of strong and democratic engagement between the people and their army, a people's army." Jamhoor

This formulation captures an important dimension of the philosophical problem: the binary between violent and nonviolent resistance is inadequate to the actual complexity of situations in which unarmed civilians face lethal state violence. The July 2024 demonstrators were not simply choosing nonviolent resistance as a philosophical position: they were expressing a specific form of political courage that involved accepting the risk of death rather than withdrawing from the public space that the state was violently trying to clear. Whether this is most appropriately described as "nonviolent" resistance or as something more complex, a form of political action

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that asserts the priority of political presence over physical safety, is a genuine philosophical question.

The philosophical tradition that most directly illuminates this question is the one developed by Judith Butler in "Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly" (2015). Butler argues that mass political assembly, the gathering of bodies in public space to assert political demands, is itself a form of political action that challenges the state's attempt to control and manage political space. The specific form of assembly that characterized the July 2024 uprising, young people standing in the streets in the face of live fire, constituted a powerful assertion of the claim that public space belongs to the public, not to the state, and that this claim is worth dying for. From Butler's perspective, this is not simply a choice between violent and nonviolent resistance: it is a form of political action that uses the body's vulnerability as a political statement, and that is both extremely powerful in its moral claim and extremely costly in its human consequences.

Sikder's revolutionary project, with its emphasis on armed struggle as the primary form of political action, did not adequately appreciate the political potential of this kind of assembly-based political action. This is not simply a tactical observation: it reflects a deeper philosophical difference between a politics that sees the primary revolutionary subject as the armed vanguard and a politics that sees the primary revolutionary subject as the assembled mass of ordinary people asserting their political presence and their demands for dignity and justice. The July 2024 uprising demonstrated the extraordinary power of the latter approach, while also demonstrating, through the state's lethal response, the genuine dangers that political assembly in the face of authoritarian state power entails.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: THE GARMENT WORKER AND THE REVOLUTIONARY: CLASS STRUGGLE IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH

37.1 The Contemporary Working Class as the Unfinished Subject of Sikder's Revolution

The single most important dimension of the unfinished revolution that Sikder's life pointed toward is the question of the working class's political agency in contemporary Bangladesh. The garment workers of Dhaka and Chittagong, overwhelmingly women, predominantly migrant from the rural districts of the delta, constitute the largest and most economically significant concentration of wage labor in Bangladesh's history. Their political situation in the post-uprising moment provides the most concrete and most immediate test of the analytical framework that Sikder developed.

The garment workers participated massively in the July 2024 uprising. Workers and their families joined in the mass protests. The accumulated rage over four garment worker killings in November 2023 also motivated workers to stand in solidarity with the student movement of July 2024. Unable to tolerate the sight of state forces brutalising students, they too joined the uprising.

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History tells us that every mass movement in this country succeeded when students and workers fought together. Netra

But the post-uprising experience of garment workers has been one of exclusion from the gains of the political transition. After the fall of the Awami League, the workers thought they were finally free from 16 years of misrule and hoped that labour exploitation would end, that a fair wage structure would be established, and that closed factories would be reopened. But none of that happened. Instead, the existing system remains intact, with the state prioritising labour exploitation and repression. Netra

After the July 2024 movement and the mass uprising of 5 August, many pro-Awami League garment businessmen went into hiding, abandoning their factories. Over the following year, these factories continuously shut down, depriving workers of their rightful legal entitlements. After 20 to 25 years of employment, workers returned home with only token wages, lacking their service benefits and other entitlements. CADTM

This pattern of working-class participation in a liberation movement followed by working-class exclusion from its gains is structurally identical to what Sikder described in relation to the 1971 liberation war: the working class as an essential force in the struggle for liberation but not as the primary beneficiary of the liberation achieved. The specific mechanisms are different, a post-uprising transitional government rather than a post-independence comprador government, a global garment value chain rather than Pakistani colonial extraction, but the structural dynamic is the same.

The most recent analysis of garment workers' conditions in Bangladesh, including the November 2025 Amnesty International report on the global garment industry's denial of workers' right to unionize, confirms the structural analysis that Sikder's framework implies. Governments, factories and global fashion brands are profiting from the continued repression of garment workers and abuse of their labour rights in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. An unholy alliance of fashion brands, factory owners and the governments of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is propping up an industry known for its endemic human rights abuses. Amnesty International

This analysis, produced by one of the world's leading human rights organizations, essentially confirms the structural critique of the international political economy of garment capitalism that flows naturally from Sikder's analytical framework. The specific actors are different from those Sikder identified (international retail corporations rather than Pakistani colonial administrators, IMF loan conditionalities rather than Urdu language imposition), but the fundamental structure of exploitation, the transfer of surplus from the labor of Bangladeshi workers to the profits of international capital, with the Bangladeshi state serving as the guarantor of the conditions necessary for that transfer, is precisely what the comprador analysis predicts.

37.2 Land, Dispossession, and the Persistence of the Agrarian Question

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The land question, which Sikder placed at the center of his revolutionary programme, has evolved in complex ways in contemporary Bangladesh but has not been resolved. The specific forms of land dispossession and agrarian exploitation have changed substantially from the zamindari system that the Permanent Settlement created and the semi-feudal sharecropping relations of the 1960s and 1970s, but the fundamental structural problem of access to land for the rural poor remains acute.

Bangladesh has become increasingly urbanized since independence, with the proportion of the population living in urban areas rising from under ten percent at independence to over forty percent in the early 2020s. This massive urbanization has been driven primarily by the expansion of the garment industry and related manufacturing, and it has produced a new form of the land question: the dispossession of urban poor communities by real estate development, industrial expansion, and the construction of export processing zones.

The specific mechanism of this urban land dispossession is worth examining in detail, because it illustrates the continuing relevance of Sikder's structural analysis in a very different social setting from the one he analyzed. In Dhaka, the expansion of upper-middle-class residential areas and commercial development has consistently displaced low-income communities, often through processes that combine legal formal mechanisms with political patronage and extralegal coercion. The communities displaced by these processes are typically the same communities that provide the labor for the garment industry and other low-wage urban employment: the internal migrants from the rural delta who have come to the city seeking economic opportunity and who find themselves trapped between low wages and insecure housing.

In rural areas, the land question continues to manifest through the mechanisms Sikder identified: concentration of land in the hands of politically connected families, vulnerability of poor peasants to land loss through indebtedness, and the use of political influence to circumvent legal protections of tenants' and small holders' rights. The Bangladesh agriculture census data continue to show extremely high land concentration, with the top quintile of landowners controlling the great majority of agricultural land while the bottom half of rural households are effectively landless.

37.3 The Digital Dimension: Social Media, Political Organizing, and the Legacy of the Vanguard

The post-uprising political landscape of Bangladesh in 2025 and 2026 has been shaped in significant ways by the emergence of social media as a primary medium of political communication and political organizing. The July 2024 uprising itself was organized substantially through social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Facebook, and the subsequent political debates and mobilizations have continued to be mediated through these platforms in ways that create new organizational possibilities and new organizational challenges.

The relationship between social media organizing and the organizational tradition that Sikder represented deserves careful analysis. The apparent contrast between the decentralized,

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horizontal, leaderless organizing of social media-enabled political movements and the centralized, hierarchical, leader-focused organizing of the Leninist vanguard party tradition is real but not absolute. Social media platforms enable rapid, large-scale political mobilization that would have been impossible for a clandestine vanguard organization like the PBSP. They also create new possibilities for building political consciousness and solidarity across geographic distances. But they present their own significant limitations as instruments of sustained political organizing.

The specific limitations of social media-enabled politics that are relevant for the assessment of Sikder's legacy include: the tendency toward episodic mobilization rather than sustained organizing, the vulnerability to state surveillance and suppression (which in the Bangladesh context has included internet shutdowns and the targeting of activists identified through social media activity), the structural dynamics of social media platforms that reward emotional intensity over analytical depth, and the tendency for political mobilization to fragment into competing online narratives without the organizational discipline that sustained political action requires.

These limitations are not arguments for returning to the specific organizational model of the Leninist vanguard party, whose own specific limitations the preceding chapters have analyzed in detail. But they do suggest that the organizational problem that Lenin and Mao were addressing, how to sustain political commitment and translate mass mobilization into lasting political change, remains genuinely unsolved by the advent of social media, and that the intellectual tradition that Sikder represented has something to contribute to thinking about this problem even if its specific organizational prescriptions are inadequate to contemporary conditions.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT: THE CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESHI LEFT AND THE APRIL 2026 ELECTION

38.1 The April 2026 Election: Stakes and Prospects

The April 2026 general election in Bangladesh, scheduled to be held while this textbook is being completed, represents the most significant political moment in Bangladesh's post-independence history since the July 2024 uprising itself. Understanding the stakes of this election and the specific ways in which the analytical questions raised by Sikder's legacy are relevant to it constitutes the final major analytical task of this Part.

Bangladesh is preparing for a crucial parliamentary election and a referendum on state reforms in early 2026. The announcement of the election date marks a turning point in the country's political landscape. The polls follow a year-and-a-half of transformative events, starting with a massive student-led uprising in the summer of 2024 that forced former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina out of office and into exile in India. About 127.6 million eligible voters in 300

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constituencies will cast their ballots, and for the first time in Bangladesh's history, Bangladeshi expatriates will be able to participate via postal ballots. The Diplomat

The specific political landscape of the April 2026 election reflects the complexity of the post-uprising political moment. The Monsoon Revolution not only toppled Hasina's regime but also dismantled the decades-long duopoly in Bangladeshi politics held by her party, the Awami League, and its rival, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). This transformation has opened space for new political actors, including the student-revolutionary-led National Citizen Party (NCP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist party banned by Hasina's regime that is experiencing a resurgence. The NCP has positioned itself as a centrist, pluralist force calling for a 'Second Republic' and a new constitution. Chatham House

On 17 November 2025, the International Crimes Tribunal ruled that Sheikh Hasina and her co-defendants were guilty of war crimes and sentenced her along with former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death. Khaleda Zia, former Bangladesh Prime Minister and historic rival of Hasina, died on 30 December 2025 after a prolonged illness, sparking a change in Bangladesh's political landscape. Wikipedia

The left's position in the April 2026 election is one of marginal electoral significance combined with significant intellectual and moral influence on the broader political debate. The organized Maoist and Marxist-Leninist left, including the successor organizations of the PBSP, have consistently polled under one percent in Bangladesh's general elections since the 1990s and are unlikely to achieve significantly better results in April 2026. The broader electoral left, including various socialist and progressive parties, also remains electorally marginal.

But the left's intellectual and moral influence on the post-uprising political debate has been more significant than its electoral marginality suggests. The specific analytical frameworks through which the political failures of the Awami League period have been understood, the class analysis of elite capture of the state, the critique of the comprador relationship between Bangladeshi capital and international corporations, the analysis of the garment industry's exploitation of workers, all draw on traditions of political economy analysis that trace a direct lineage to the Marxist and Maoist traditions that Sikder represented.

38.2 The National Citizen Party: New Politics for an Old Problem?

The National Citizen Party (NCP), the most significant new political force to emerge from the July 2024 uprising, represents an interesting case for analyzing the relationship between the uprising's political aspirations and the structural questions that Sikder's legacy raises. The NCP's emergence from the student movement and its self-positioning as a post-partisan, pluralist force challenging the established BNP-Awami League duopoly reflects the uprising's rejection of the existing political class while raising important questions about what structural political programme can genuinely serve the interests of the working class and poor.

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The NCP has positioned itself as a centrist, pluralist force calling for a 'Second Republic' and a new constitution. Its appeal, despite its organizational weaknesses and political inexperience, reflects widespread fatigue with dynastic and corrupt politics. Chatham House

The NCP's political programme, as publicly articulated in the period leading up to the April 2026 election, has been notably focused on institutional and constitutional reform: demands for a more democratic political system, for accountability for the violations of the Hasina period, for a genuinely independent judiciary and civil service, and for constitutional reform to prevent the kind of authoritarian concentration of power that the Hasina government achieved. These are genuinely important demands that address real institutional failures, and the NCP's organizational capacity to mobilize around them, particularly among the young people who were the uprising's core activists, is a significant political asset.

What is notably less prominent in the NCP's programme is the structural economic analysis that Sikder's framework would emphasize: the analysis of the class forces that have captured and systematically distorted the Bangladeshi state and economy, the specific mechanisms through which working-class and rural poor interests have been subordinated to elite interests, and the specific structural reforms (land reform, trade union rights, control of garment industry labor relations, limits on elite accumulation through political connection) that would be necessary to genuinely serve those interests.

This gap between institutional reform and structural economic analysis is the same gap that characterized the Awami League's early governance: a party that came to power with a genuine mandate for democratic governance but that failed to translate that democratic mandate into structural economic change because its class base and its political networks were embedded in the existing structures of economic privilege. Whether the NCP can avoid reproducing this pattern, or whether the structural pressures of Bangladeshi political economy will push any government with a middle-class leadership toward the same patterns of elite accommodation, is one of the most important political questions of the April 2026 election.

38.3 The Constitutional Reform Debate and Sikder's Jurisprudential Legacy

The National Consensus Commission's constitutional reform proposals, which were under discussion through 2025 and which are intended to shape the political order of post-uprising Bangladesh, constitute the most concrete and immediate expression of the constitutional and jurisprudential questions that Sikder's legacy raises. The Interim Government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, launched an ambitious reform agenda through 11 commissions and the National Consensus Commission, culminating in the July National Charter, a comprehensive framework of 84 proposals that addresses nearly every aspect of Bangladesh's democratic architecture. IRI

The constitutional reform debate raises in a contemporary form the same fundamental questions about the relationship between formal constitutional structure and actual class power that Sikder's analysis of the 1972 constitution addressed. The 1972 constitution was, as we analyzed

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in Part Three, a genuinely progressive document in its formal commitments that was systematically undermined by the class politics of the government that operated under it. The question for the post-uprising constitutional reform is whether the specific institutional changes being proposed, including stronger institutional checks on executive power, more independent judicial appointments, limits on prime ministerial authority, and electoral reforms, can genuinely constrain the class politics that have systematically distorted Bangladeshi governance.

The jurisprudential tradition that is most relevant for this assessment is the tradition of what constitutional theorist Roberto Unger calls "empowered democracy," the attempt to redesign democratic institutions to genuinely redistribute power to ordinarily marginalized groups rather than simply formalizing the existing distribution of power in constitutional arrangements. Unger's "False Necessity" (1987) and subsequent work develop the argument that existing constitutional structures tend to freeze existing power distributions under the guise of neutral institutional design, and that genuinely democratic constitutionalism requires institutional innovation that actively counteracts concentrations of power.

Applied to Bangladesh, an empowered democracy approach to constitutional reform would go beyond the institutional reforms focused on preventing the kind of prime-ministerial authoritarianism that Hasina achieved. It would also address the specific mechanisms through which economic power translates into political power: the relationship between political finance and policy outcomes, the use of state contracts and licensing to build politically connected business networks, the systematic weakening of trade union rights that serves the interests of the garment industry ownership class, and the land tenure and agricultural credit systems that continue to disadvantage the rural poor.

Following the political upheaval in 2024 to 2025, a Constitutional Reform Commission has proposed the removal of secularism, socialism, and nationalism from the constitution, a move that signals a decisive rupture from the nation's founding principles and has sparked significant debate about the ideological direction of the post-uprising political order. ResearchGate

The proposal to remove "socialism" from the constitutional state principles is particularly significant for the assessment of Sikder's legacy. The inclusion of socialism in the 1972 constitution was always more symbolic than substantive: the Mujib government's economic policies were not socialist in any meaningful sense, and subsequent governments of all parties have moved progressively further from any commitment to socialist principles in economic policy. But the symbolic removal of "socialism" from the constitution represents a formal ideological realignment that makes visible the class politics that have always governed Bangladeshi governance, and it closes off the constitutional space within which socialist political arguments could be made about the obligations of the Bangladeshi state.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE: SIKDER AND THE GLOBAL TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS

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39.1 Global Inequality, Climate Crisis, and the Structural Analysis

The political analysis that Siraj Sikder developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s was addressed to the specific conditions of East Bengal under Pakistani colonial rule and then of Bangladesh in its first years of independence. But the structural analytical framework he developed, the emphasis on the systematic transfer of resources from the poor to the wealthy, the analysis of the role of international capital in shaping national political economies to serve the interests of the wealthy against those of the poor, and the insistence on connecting political analysis to the specific material conditions of the most marginalized, speaks directly to the global conditions of the twenty-first century.

Global inequality in 2026 represents one of the most acute structural crises in human history. The wealth concentrated in the hands of the richest few hundred individuals globally exceeds the total wealth of the bottom half of the world's population, a distributional concentration that is unprecedented in recorded history and that is directly connected to the same mechanisms of comprador capitalism, financial extraction, and political capture of states that Sikder's analysis pointed toward at the national level.

The garment industry's specific structure illustrates the global dimension of this analysis with particular clarity. Bangladeshi garment workers produce clothing for retail corporations headquartered in the United States, the European Union, and Japan, corporations whose profit margins and shareholder returns depend directly on the maintenance of very low wages and suppressed labor rights in Bangladesh. The specific mechanism of value transfer that this represents, from the labor of Bangladeshi workers to the profits of international retail corporations, is a perfect illustration of the comprador structure at the global scale: Bangladeshi capital (the garment factory owners) serves as an intermediary for international capital, enabling the extraction of surplus labor from Bangladeshi workers for the benefit of the global retail giants.

The climate crisis introduces a new and urgent dimension to the structural analysis that Sikder's framework implies. Bangladesh is one of the countries most acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including sea level rise, more intense cyclones, and changes in monsoon patterns that threaten agricultural production. The specific distributional character of these climate impacts, which fall most heavily on the poor and the rural who lack the resources to adapt, while the wealthy can protect themselves, is precisely the kind of structural inequity that Sikder's analysis was designed to address.

The connection between the climate crisis and the political economy of development that Sikder analyzed is direct: the same comprador structure that maintains Bangladesh's garment workers in conditions of extreme economic vulnerability also maintains the government's dependence on international capital and its consequent accommodation to global economic arrangements that are driving the climate crisis. A genuinely sovereign and worker-led politics, of the kind that Sikder's programme aspired to create, would have both the motivation and the political independence to prioritize climate adaptation and resistance to the fossil fuel economy that is

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driving the climate crisis over the accommodation to international capital that characterizes the existing Bangladeshi political economy.

39.2 The Global South and the Politics of Structural Transformation

The analytical framework that Sikder developed for East Bengal, combining colonial analysis, class analysis, and the theory of national liberation, has been one of the most widely applied theoretical frameworks in the global South throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Understanding how this framework has been applied, adapted, and critiqued across diverse global contexts provides important perspective for assessing both its analytical contributions and its limitations.

The application of Maoist frameworks to conditions in the global South has produced very different outcomes in different national contexts, depending on the specific geographic, social, and political conditions that determine the feasibility of the strategies the framework implies. The most successful applications, in the sense of producing durable mass organizations and meaningful structural change, have generally been those that most thoroughly adapted the Maoist framework to local conditions rather than those that most faithfully reproduced the Chinese model.

The most instructive recent example of this adaptive application of Maoist analytical frameworks is the experience of various social movements and political organizations in Latin America that have drawn on the Maoist tradition's emphasis on the peasantry as a revolutionary subject, the analysis of land concentration and agrarian inequality, and the theory of imperialism and comprador capitalism, while developing very different organizational forms and strategies from the vanguard party model. The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, and various indigenous political movements in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru have all drawn on elements of the Maoist analytical tradition while innovating significantly in terms of organizational form, relationship to electoral politics, and the specific programmatic demands they advance.

The common thread that connects these diverse movements to Sikder's revolutionary project is the insistence that formal political democracy is insufficient without structural economic transformation, that the most marginalized must be centered rather than peripheralized in any genuinely emancipatory politics, and that the analysis of class and imperial power must be grounded in the specific material conditions of the groups being organized rather than in abstract theoretical schemas.

39.3 Sikder and the Theory of the South: Intellectual Contributions to a Global Tradition

Part Four of this textbook examined the relationship between Sikder's theoretical project and the subsequently developed traditions of postcolonial theory and decolonial theory. Here, in the perspective of this final chapter, it is worth identifying the specific intellectual contributions that Sikder's project makes to what might be called the "theory of the South," the diverse body of

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theoretical work produced by thinkers in the global South that engages with the specific conditions of postcolonial societies and seeks to develop theoretical frameworks adequate to those conditions.

Sikder's most distinctive contribution to this theoretical tradition is what might be called the methodology of structural specificity: the insistence on analyzing the specific mechanisms through which exploitation and domination operate in particular historical and geographical contexts, rather than applying abstract theoretical schemas derived from other contexts. The colonial thesis was not simply the assertion that East Bengal was "like" a colony: it was a detailed, evidence-based analysis of the specific mechanisms of economic extraction, political exclusion, and cultural subordination that constituted the colonial relationship in the specific Bengali context. This analytical approach, which combines structural macro-analysis with close attention to specific historical and geographical conditions, remains one of the most valuable methodological contributions that the Maoist tradition, in Sikder's Bengali version, makes to the broader theory of the South.

The second distinctive contribution is the insistence on the political agency of the most marginalized. Against the tendencies of both liberal developmentalism (which treats the poor as objects of policy rather than as political subjects) and cultural nationalism (which dissolves class distinction in a common national identity), Sikder insisted on the political capacity and the political claims of those who had nothing. The sarbahara, as a political subject rather than as an object of charity or policy, constitutes Sikder's most enduring contribution to the political theory of the South.

The third contribution is the analysis of the comprador state and its relationship to international capital. In the specific formulation that Sikder developed, the comprador analysis has some limitations and requires updating for contemporary conditions. But the fundamental insight, that the post-colonial state's relationship to international capital systematically shapes and constrains its capacity to serve the interests of its poorest citizens, remains analytically powerful and politically relevant across a wide range of global South contexts.

CHAPTER FORTY: THE STUDENTS, THE WORKERS, AND THE PEASANTS: SIKDER'S VISION AND THE POLITICAL FUTURE

40.1 Three Subjects, One Struggle: The Analytical Framework for a New Politics

The political subjects that Sikder placed at the center of his revolutionary programme, the students who would provide the intellectual and organizational leadership, the workers who would constitute the organized force of the urban proletariat, and the peasants who would provide the numerical mass and the agrarian base of the revolution, were not arbitrary categories. They reflected a specific structural analysis of East Bengali society and a specific theory of the class forces that would be necessary for revolutionary transformation.

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Five decades after Sikder's death, these three political subjects remain central to any serious analysis of the possibilities for progressive political change in Bangladesh, even as the specific conditions and characteristics of each have changed substantially. The students who participated in the July 2024 uprising are not the students of the East Pakistan Student Union who debated Soviet and Chinese lines in the mid-1960s: they are young people formed by very different historical experiences, educated in both public universities and the newly significant private universities, connected through social media to global political cultures and debates, and animated by aspirations that combine demands for democratic governance with concerns about employment, inequality, and the environmental future. But the specific role of students as intellectual and organizational bridge-builders between different social groups, and as political actors with particular advantages in terms of mobility, education, and relative freedom from the immediate material pressures that constrain the political participation of workers and peasants, remains as relevant in 2026 as it was in 1968.

The workers of contemporary Bangladesh, as we have analyzed in the preceding sections, are above all the garment workers of the export processing zones and the factories of Dhaka and Chittagong. They are a very different working class from the small and nascent industrial working class of Sikder's time: they are numerous, concentrated, increasingly organized (despite systematic restrictions on trade union activity), and directly embedded in global economic structures that connect their exploitation to the consumption patterns of the wealthy world. They are also, as the post-uprising experience has demonstrated, capable of extraordinary political courage and collective action when the conditions are right, and they are increasingly aware of the connection between their economic exploitation and the political structures that maintain it.

The peasants of contemporary Bangladesh face conditions that have both changed dramatically and remained structurally consistent with what Sikder analyzed. The proportion of the population engaged primarily in agriculture has fallen substantially, as urbanization and industrial development have drawn millions from the countryside to the cities. But the rural poor who remain, including the sharecroppers and agricultural laborers of the delta region, the small and marginal farmers who own insufficient land for economic security, and the communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts whose land rights remain contested and whose cultural survival is threatened, continue to face forms of exploitation and dispossession that Sikder's structural analysis remains relevant for understanding.

40.2 What Is to Be Done? The Programmatic Question in 2026

The question "what is to be done?" is one of the most famous questions in the history of revolutionary politics, posed by Chernyshevsky in the novel that inspired Lenin's organizational treatise of the same name. It is also the question that any serious engagement with Siraj Sikder's legacy must ultimately address, if it is to be more than an exercise in historical nostalgia or academic criticism: what specific political and organizational actions, in the conditions of Bangladesh in 2026, would advance the structural transformation that Sikder's analysis identified as necessary for genuine social justice?

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This textbook has sought to be analytically honest rather than politically programmatic: its goal has been to provide the historical and theoretical tools for understanding Sikder's significance rather than to prescribe a specific political programme for the present. But the analytical conclusions that the preceding chapters have reached do have specific programmatic implications, and it is appropriate to state them clearly.

The first implication is that the most important single structural change in Bangladesh's political economy, from the perspective of the analysis this textbook has developed, would be the genuine establishment of independent trade union rights in the garment industry. The systematic suppression of independent trade union organizing in the garment sector is the mechanism through which four million workers are prevented from exercising any meaningful political or economic agency in relation to the international corporations that profit from their labor and the Bangladeshi political economy that structures their working conditions. Genuine trade union rights, including the right to organize at factory level, the right to collective bargaining, and effective legal protection against anti-union discrimination, would represent the single most significant practical advance in the structural position of the working class that is possible in the short to medium term.

The second implication is that meaningful land reform, specifically targeted at the continuing problem of rural landlessness and near-landlessness, remains a necessary component of any genuinely emancipatory politics in Bangladesh. The specific forms of land reform that are appropriate have changed since Sikder's time: the acute conflict between landlords and sharecroppers that characterized the Barisal delta in the 1970s has been modified by urbanization and changes in agrarian relations. But the fundamental problem of land access for the rural poor remains unresolved and requires specific political attention.

The third implication is that the relationship between Bangladesh and international capital, specifically in the garment industry but more broadly in the financial and commercial sectors, requires much more critical political attention than it has received in the post-uprising political debate. The specific mechanisms through which value is extracted from Bangladeshi workers for the benefit of international retail corporations, the role of international financial institutions in constraining the Bangladeshi government's policy options, and the specific forms of financial extraction that have accompanied Bangladesh's incorporation into global capital markets, all require the kind of structural political economy analysis that Sikder's framework was designed to provide.

40.3 The Future of the Left: Organizational Innovation and Political Strategy

The Bangladeshi left's organizational weakness in the post-uprising political moment, its inability to translate the analytical insights of its political tradition into effective electoral and mass political action, reflects organizational failures that need to be honestly confronted rather than explained away. Understanding what organizational innovations would be necessary for a more effective left politics in Bangladesh is one of the most practically important questions raised by Sikder's legacy.

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The organizational model of the Leninist vanguard party, which Sikder adopted and which the PBSP and its successors have maintained in various forms, is inadequate to the conditions of contemporary Bangladesh. This inadequacy is not primarily ideological: it is not simply that the specific political positions of the Leninist tradition are wrong. It is organizational and strategic: the specific organizational form of the clandestine vanguard party operating through democratic centralism is poorly suited to building the kind of mass political presence that effective political action in contemporary conditions requires.

The organizational form that appears most appropriate for a politics committed to structural transformation in contemporary Bangladesh combines several elements that the Leninist model either lacks or inadequately develops. The first is genuine rootedness in specific working-class and rural poor communities: organizational work that starts from the specific conditions, concerns, and aspirations of those communities rather than from the party's theoretical programme. The second is democratic internal culture: genuine mechanisms for accountability of leadership to membership, open debate about political strategy, and the regular renewal of leadership through transparent processes. The third is legal-political engagement: the willingness to operate openly in the legal political space, including electoral politics, rather than treating legal political activity as inherently compromising.

The specific organizational innovations that would embody these principles in the Bangladeshi context might include: independent trade union organizing in the garment sector and other industries, explicitly disconnected from the patronage politics of established parties; peasant rights organizations that combine legal advocacy with community organizing in the rural delta; feminist political organizing that centers the specific experiences and demands of women workers, peasant women, and marginalized women more broadly; and broad coalition building among all of these constituencies around shared demands for structural economic reform and genuine democratic accountability.

None of these organizational forms is new or unfamiliar to the history of the Bangladeshi left. What is required is not invention but the sustained, disciplined organizational work of building them in ways that are genuinely accountable to the communities they seek to represent, that are honestly engaged with the specific conditions of contemporary Bangladesh rather than mechanically applying historical organizational models, and that maintain the intellectual and moral commitment to structural transformation that Sikder's life exemplified even as they develop the strategic flexibility and organizational innovation that his specific project lacked.

40.4 The Intellectual Task: Continuing the Analysis

The intellectual task that Siraj Sikder's legacy assigns to contemporary scholars and political analysts is clear: to continue the systematic structural analysis of Bangladeshi society and political economy that he began, updating it to reflect the dramatic social and economic changes of the past fifty years, enriching it with the analytical tools developed in postcolonial theory, political economy, feminist theory, and the comparative study of social movements, and connecting it to the specific political questions and possibilities of the contemporary moment.

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This is a substantial intellectual task that requires rigorous engagement with empirical evidence about the actual conditions of working-class and peasant life in Bangladesh, with the specific mechanisms of political and economic power in the contemporary Bangladeshi state, and with the specific forms of international economic integration that shape the possibilities and constraints of Bangladeshi development. It also requires genuine intellectual humility: the recognition that no single theoretical tradition, including the Maoist tradition that Sikder worked within, provides a complete and adequate framework for understanding the complexity of contemporary conditions, and that the most productive intellectual work will draw eclectically but critically on multiple theoretical traditions.

The specific analytical contributions that this continued intellectual work needs to develop include: a rigorous class analysis of contemporary Bangladeshi society that takes seriously both the garment workers as a new and central political subject and the continuing importance of the agrarian question for the rural poor; a structural analysis of the specific mechanisms of elite capture in the Bangladeshi state that goes beyond the generic corruption analysis of liberal anticorruption discourse; a careful analysis of the specific forms of international economic integration that shape Bangladeshi political economy, including the garment industry's global value chain, the financial sector's relationship to international capital markets, and the IMF and World Bank's role in constraining Bangladeshi macroeconomic policy; and a feminist political economy analysis that takes seriously the specific experiences and political agency of women workers and peasants who constitute both the primary workforce of the garment industry and a significant portion of the rural poor.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE: TOWARDS A CONCLUSION: THE THIRTY-YEAR LIFE AND ITS LASTING CLAIMS

41.1 The Measure of a Life: What Thirty Years Can Achieve

Siraj Sikder lived for thirty years and three months, from September 27, 1944, to January 2, 1975. In that time he passed from childhood in a village in Shariatpur through a brilliant engineering education at the most prestigious technical university in East Pakistan, through the political formation that transformed him from a student activist into a revolutionary theorist, through the extraordinary compressed history of the liberation war and the founding of the Sarbahara Party, and through three years of armed revolutionary struggle against the independent Bangladeshi government before his capture and killing.

By any conventional measure, this was a life that failed. The revolution Sikder sought to make did not happen. The party he founded was effectively destroyed within a few years of his death. The specific programmatic objectives he pursued, the new democratic revolution, the redistribution of land to the landless, the nationalization of major industries under workers' control, the independence of Bangladesh from all imperialist and social-imperialist influence, none of these were achieved either by the PBSP or by any subsequent political force.

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But the conventional measure of political success, did the revolution happen, is an inadequate measure for assessing the significance of a life devoted to a project as large and as difficult as the transformation of an unjust social order. The more adequate measure asks: did the life contribute something of lasting value to the project of building a more just world? Did it produce insights that illuminate the conditions of injustice and the possibilities of transformation? Did it exemplify qualities of intellectual and moral commitment that remain inspirational? Did it raise questions that remain important even when the specific answers it proposed were inadequate?

By these measures, Siraj Sikder's life achieved something of genuine and lasting value. His colonial thesis produced one of the most systematic and rigorously argued analyses of East Bengal's political economy and its relationship to the Pakistani state that has ever been written, an analysis that remains historically significant and theoretically illuminating despite the specific political circumstances in which it was developed. His organizational work, though ultimately unsuccessful, demonstrated that genuine alternatives to Awami League leadership were possible and that the revolutionary aspiration for a more just Bangladesh was not merely abstract but could be organized and sustained under conditions of severe repression. His death at the hands of the state he had challenged created a political symbol whose continuing power across fifty-one years of commemoration demonstrates the depth of the aspiration he represented.

41.2 Justice, History, and the Claims of the Dead

The philosophical tradition of historical justice, the question of what obligations the living have toward those who suffered injustice in the past, is one of the most challenging and least settled in the entire field of political philosophy. The specific form of this question that Sikder's killing raises, what obligations Bangladeshi society and the Bangladeshi state have toward a man who was killed extrajudicially by that state fifty-one years ago, without investigation, without accountability, and with his death celebrated by the prime minister in parliament, is a question with direct contemporary relevance.

The obligation of justice toward Siraj Sikder is not primarily an obligation toward the dead man himself, who cannot benefit from any action now taken. It is an obligation toward the living: toward the principle that the rule of law requires accountability for past violations, toward the standard that extrajudicial killing by the state is always and everywhere an injustice that must be acknowledged and addressed, and toward the political culture of Bangladesh itself, which cannot genuinely break with its history of political violence without reckoning honestly with the full scope of that history.

The specific demand of justice that Sikder's killing makes on the present is not a demand for punishment of individuals who are mostly dead, but a demand for historical reckoning: for the official acknowledgment that Sikder was killed extrajudicially and that this killing was a violation of constitutional and legal principles, for the withdrawal of the false "attempted escape" narrative that the government produced to cover the killing, and for the incorporation of this episode into the official historical narrative of Bangladesh in a way that is honest about what it represents.

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Leftist leaders at commemorations have consistently demanded trial of the killing of Siraj Sikder and other slain politicians, slamming successive governments for killing revolutionary leaders in the name of "crossfire" without giving them the minimum right to self-defence or a judicial process, and describing Siraj Sikder as among the first victims of extrajudicial killing while successive governments continued such killings using the police and later the Rapid Action Battalion. New Age

This demand connects Sikder's killing to the much longer pattern of extrajudicial killing in Bangladesh that has continued through successive governments, from the Rakkhi Bahini killings of the Mujib period through the military governments' political killings, the RAB's "crossfire" killings under both BNP and Awami League governments, and the police killings of the July 2024 uprising. A political culture that takes seriously the obligation of justice toward Siraj Sikder's memory would simultaneously take seriously the obligation of accountability for all of these subsequent killings, recognizing them as part of a continuous pattern of state violence that has consistently targeted those who challenge the political and economic power of the ruling class.

41.3 The Unfinished Revolutionary and the Unfinished Revolution

Siraj Sikder died at thirty, with his revolutionary project incomplete and his organizational vehicle destroyed or severely weakened. In this he joins a long and distinguished company of revolutionary figures who were killed before they could see the outcomes of the struggles they had dedicated their lives to: Che Guevara at thirty-nine, Thomas Sankara at thirty-seven, Patrice Lumumba at thirty-five, Steve Biko at thirty, Walter Rodney at thirty-eight. The premature deaths of revolutionary figures do not make their revolutions successful, but they do make those figures into symbols whose power over political imagination persists far beyond the specific organizations and movements they led.

The specifically "unfinished" character of Sikder's revolution, however, is not simply a matter of biographical incompleteness. It reflects the genuine structural conditions of Bangladesh's post-independence history, in which the aspiration for social transformation that the liberation war generated was consistently frustrated by the class politics of the governments that succeeded to power, by the structural constraints of dependent development within the global capitalist economy, and by the organizational weaknesses and political errors of the left movements that sought to advance that aspiration.

The revolution remains unfinished not because Sikder died too young to complete it, but because the structural conditions that made revolution necessary, the systematic exploitation of workers and peasants, the subordination of national development to the interests of a small propertied elite, the use of state violence to suppress the political agency of the most marginalized, have not been transformed. The specific organizational form through which Sikder sought to advance the revolution, the Maoist vanguard party pursuing protracted people's war, has been tried and found inadequate to the task. But the task itself remains.

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The Bangladesh of April 2026, standing at the threshold of its first genuinely competitive general election in almost two decades, faces the same fundamental question that Siraj Sikder's entire political life was devoted to answering: how can the aspiration for a more just social order, in which the working class and the peasantry are genuinely empowered rather than systematically exploited, be translated into effective political action that produces lasting structural change? The specific answer he proposed is inadequate to contemporary conditions. But the question he posed remains the right question, and the intellectual and moral tradition he represents remains a crucial resource for thinking about it seriously.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO: CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY IN FULL

42.1 A Final Philosophical Assessment

This textbook has examined Siraj Sikder's life, thought, and legacy from multiple angles over five extensive parts: historically, theoretically, jurisprudentially, comparatively, and philosophically. The time has come for a final, integrating philosophical assessment that draws on all of these dimensions.

Siraj Sikder was a figure of genuine and substantial intellectual achievement. In thirty years of life, and specifically in the seven years from the founding of the EBWM in 1968 to his killing in January 1975, he produced a body of political theoretical writing that represents one of the most systematic and analytically rigorous engagements with the specific conditions of postcolonial Bengali society that has been produced by any political thinker in the history of Bangladesh. The colonial thesis, the class analysis of the social formation, the theory of the new democratic revolution applied to East Bengali conditions, and the polemical engagements with competing theoretical positions, whatever their specific limitations, constitute a theoretical contribution that deserves serious scholarly attention.

He was also a figure of genuine and substantial moral commitment. The decision to abandon a comfortable professional career for the dangers and hardships of clandestine revolutionary organizing, the willingness to accept personal risk in the service of the cause of the poor, and the consistency with which he maintained his political commitments under conditions of severe external pressure, represent a form of moral seriousness that cannot be dismissed however one assesses the specific political positions he held.

He was also a figure with genuine and substantial organizational failures. The adoption of a strategic framework, protracted people's war, that was structurally inappropriate to the geographic conditions of the Bengal delta; the organizational authoritarianism that produced unjust internal violence within the party; the theoretical rigidity that prevented adequate strategic adaptation to changing political conditions; and the isolation of the PBSP from the broader political forces that might have provided the mass base necessary for effective revolutionary

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action: these were real and serious failures whose consequences were borne most heavily by the cadres and communities that trusted the party's leadership.

The most honest final philosophical assessment holds all of these dimensions together without reducing the complexity: acknowledging the genuine intellectual achievements, honoring the genuine moral commitment, identifying the genuine organizational failures, and contextualizing all of these within the specific historical conditions that shaped and constrained Sikder's revolutionary project. Neither hagiography nor dismissal does justice to the full complexity of the historical subject.

42.2 What Remains

When the final reckoning is made, several things remain from Siraj Sikder's life that time has not erased and that the failures of his specific organizational project have not invalidated.

The first is the colonial thesis and its analytical progeny. The argument that the relationship between a politically dominant power and its subordinated periphery constitutes a colonial relationship regardless of the formal political structures that connect them, and that this colonial relationship must be understood through the specific mechanisms of economic extraction, political exclusion, and cultural domination that characterize it, remains one of the most analytically powerful frameworks in the toolkit of structural political analysis. Its application to the Bangladesh case, and by extension to the analysis of other asymmetrical relationships in the global political economy, continues to generate insight.

The second is the class analysis of the postcolonial state. The argument that formal political independence does not guarantee genuine social liberation, that the specific class forces that assume power through independence movements tend to use state power in ways that serve their class interests rather than those of the working class and peasantry, and that a genuinely emancipatory politics requires going beyond the nationalist framework to confront the structural conditions of class exploitation, remains analytically valid and politically urgent.

The third is the commitment to the sarbahara as political subject. The insistence that those who have nothing, the landless, the homeless, the working poor, the most marginal, must be the primary political subjects rather than the objects of enlightened policy, remains the most fundamental contribution that Sikder's revolutionary project makes to contemporary political thought. In a political landscape dominated by the competing interests of different fractions of the propertied class, with the working class and the rural poor consistently marginalized and their specific interests subordinated to elite priorities, this insistence on the political centrality of the most marginalized constitutes an enduring and urgently needed political intervention.

The fourth is the ethical example. The willingness to dedicate one's life to a cause larger than personal advancement, to accept danger and hardship in the service of those who have nothing, and to maintain intellectual and moral seriousness under conditions of the most extreme external pressure, represents an ethical standard that the comfortable distance of scholarly analysis should

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not allow us to assess too condescendingly. The specific political choices Sikder made were in some respects wrong, and this textbook has said so honestly. But the quality of the commitment they expressed, the seriousness with which he took the obligation to those who were systematically excluded from the political and economic life of his society, remains morally exemplary in the most fundamental sense.

42.3 The Text as Legacy: Reading Sikder in 2026

The most concrete and durable form of Siraj Sikder's legacy is the body of theoretical writing he left behind. Available in English translation at the Marxists Internet Archive and through the Sarbaharapath.com platform maintained by the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Bangladesh, his major texts including the 1968 EBWM thesis, the draft PBSP constitution, the "Exposure" document, the polemic against the Huq-Toha group, and the 1974 document "Heroic People of East Bengal" constitute a primary source of continuing value for students of Bangladesh's political history and for anyone seeking to understand the specific tradition of Maoist revolutionary theory that they represent.

Reading these texts in 2026 requires the same combination of critical and appreciative engagement that this textbook has sought to model throughout: taking seriously the analytical insights while identifying the theoretical limitations, understanding the historical conditions that shaped specific arguments while not being bound to those conditions in evaluating the arguments' contemporary relevance, and maintaining the scholarly commitment to truth-telling even when that truth is complex and does not reduce to simple celebration or simple condemnation.

The specific analytical tradition that these texts represent, the tradition of structural political economy analysis applied to the specific conditions of a particular postcolonial society, enriched by the methodological insights of Marxist dialectics and the organizational theory of Maoism, remains a living tradition that is being developed and updated by scholars, political activists, and ordinary citizens across Bangladesh and the broader South Asian intellectual community. This textbook has sought to be a contribution to that tradition, honest about its limitations while committed to its core methodological and political insights.

42.4 A Final Word

Siraj Sikder died on January 2, 1975, at thirty years of age, killed by the state he had fought against, without trial, without due process, without justice. His killer came to parliament and asked rhetorically where he was, and the assembled representatives of the comprador bourgeoisie he had identified cheered. He was buried at Mohammadpur in Dhaka. His grave is visited every year by the people who remember him, who lay wreaths in the January cold, who speak of what he stood for and why he mattered.

On January 2, 2026, the fifty-first anniversary of his death, those same kinds of people gathered again at the same grave, and at the National Museum at Shahbagh, and at the Bangladesh Shishu

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Kallyan Parishad auditorium, to remember him. Outside the auditorium, Bangladesh was preparing for a general election. Garment workers were organizing for wage increases and facing police crackdowns. Rural families were navigating the continuing insecurity of near-landlessness in a flooded delta. Young people were trying to build new political organizations adequate to the moment that the July 2024 uprising had created. The revolution Sikder sought remained unfinished.

His grave remains. The questions he asked remain. The people for whom he asked them remain. And the intellectual tradition of structural analysis, moral commitment, and organizational creativity that his life exemplified remains available to those who are serious about the continuing task of building a more just world in the specific and difficult conditions of twenty-first century Bangladesh.

That is the legacy. It is enough.

FINAL CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY: THE ARC OF SIRAJ SIKDER'S SIGNIFICANCE

September 27, 1944: Siraj Sikder born in Lakarta village, Bhedarganj, Shariatpur district.

1959: Passes matriculation from Barisal Zilla School.

1963: Admitted to EPUET (now BUET) for civil engineering.

1965: Aligns with the pro-China faction of the East Pakistan Student Union.

1967: Graduates from BUET with civil engineering degree; elected vice-president of the Student Union (Menon group).

January 8, 1968: Founds the Purba Bangla Sramik Andolon (EBWM) at a conference attended by 45 to 50 activists at a worker's house near the Dhaka Jute Mills.

December 1, 1968: Produces the expanded and revised EBWM thesis.

1969: Mass uprising (Gono Obbhuthan) topples Ayub Khan.

April 30, 1971: Forms the Purba Banglar Sashastra Dheshapremik Bahini (Armed Patriotic Force) at Swarupkathi, Barisal.

June 3, 1971: Founds the Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party at Peyarabagan, Bhimruli, Jhalokati district.

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September 1971: Writes the draft constitution of the PBSP.

December 16, 1971: Bangladesh achieves independence.

January 14, 1972: First PBSP Party Congress; Sikder elected president.

April 1972: Writes "Exposure of the Draft Strategy and Program of the So-Called East Bengal Communist Party."

April 1973: Forms the Purba Banglar Jatiya Mukti Front (National Liberation Front) with eleven mass organizations.

1974: Great Bangladesh famine; hundreds of thousands dead.

1974: Writes "Heroic People of East Bengal, Our Struggle Has Not Yet Finished."

January 25, 1975: BAKSAL introduced; single-party presidential system.

January 2, 1975: Siraj Sikder killed in state custody, aged thirty years and three months.

August 15, 1975: Military coup; Mujib and family killed.

1977: Anwarul Kabir becomes PBSP general secretary; begins long period of underground leadership.

2024: PBSP holds its Fifth Party Congress; July 2024 uprising topples Hasina government.

January 2, 2025: Fiftieth anniversary commemoration of Sikder's death; large mural painted at Dhaka University; mural controversially erased and recreated.

November 17, 2025: Sheikh Hasina sentenced to death in absentia by International Crimes Tribunal for crimes against humanity during the July 2024 uprising.

January 2, 2026: Fifty-first anniversary of Sikder's death; commemorations at Mohammadpur grave, Shahbagh, and multiple venues across Bangladesh.

April 2026: Bangladesh general election; the first genuinely competitive election since 2008.

FINAL GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

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April 2026 Election: Bangladesh's first genuinely competitive general election since 2008, held under the oversight of the Yunus interim government following the July 2024 uprising that ended the Awami League's fifteen-year rule.

July Declaration: The political manifesto released by Bangladesh's interim government in August 2025, outlining 84 proposals for democratic reform and institutional reconstruction as the framework for the political transition.

July 2024 Uprising (Monsoon Revolution): The mass student-led uprising in Bangladesh that began as a protest against the government job quota system and escalated into a demand for regime change, ultimately forcing Sheikh Hasina's resignation and flight to India on August 5, 2024. Approximately one thousand people were killed by state forces during the uprising.

National Citizen Party (NCP / Jatiya Nagarik Party): The student-led political party that emerged from the July 2024 uprising, self-positioning as a centrist, pluralist force calling for a "Second Republic" and a new constitution, and participating in the April 2026 general election.

Sarbahara Path: The online platform maintained by the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Bangladesh through which Siraj Sikder's theoretical writings have been preserved and disseminated in both Bengali and English translation.

Shaheed Biplobi O Desh Premik Smriti Sangsad: The martyred revolutionaries and patriots memorial council, the primary organization that has consistently organized annual commemorations of Siraj Sikder's death on January 2 and that has led demands for accountability for his killing.

Unfinished Revolution: The concept applied to Siraj Sikder's revolutionary project to describe not simply its organizational failure but the continuing relevance of the structural conditions and the emancipatory aspirations that animated it, which remain operative in contemporary Bangladesh despite the specific defeat of the organizational vehicle Sikder created.

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End of Part Five

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End of the Complete Five-Part Textbook: SIRAJ SIKDER: REVOLUTIONARY, ENGINEER, AND THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

A Final Note on the Complete Work

This five-part textbook has sought to provide the most comprehensive scholarly engagement with the life, thought, and legacy of Siraj Sikder that has yet been produced in the English language. It has drawn on the full range of primary and secondary sources available for understanding this subject, has engaged seriously with the theoretical traditions that are most relevant for analyzing Sikder's significance, and has been attentive throughout to the most recent scholarly and political developments, including those of 2024, 2025, and 2026.

The textbook has been honest about its own limitations. The historical record of the PBSP's internal organizational life is incomplete, and significant uncertainty remains about specific events and decisions. The theoretical assessments offered are the author's scholarly judgments, not established consensus positions. The political implications drawn from the historical and theoretical analysis are offered as analytical conclusions that follow from the evidence and argument, not as prescriptions for specific political action.

What the textbook has consistently maintained throughout all five parts is the conviction that Siraj Sikder's life and thought deserve serious scholarly engagement rather than either hagiographic celebration or dismissive condemnation, that the questions he raised about colonial history, class power, political economy, and revolutionary possibility remain important and urgent in 2026, and that the intellectual and moral tradition he represented, whatever its specific organizational failures, constitutes a genuine resource for the continuing project of thinking seriously about justice, liberation, and the conditions of human flourishing in a world still marked by the legacies of colonialism and the structures of capitalist exploitation.

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